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GEORGE MOORE'S REALISTIC NOVELS: *A MUMMER'S WIFE*, *A DRAMA IN MUSLIN* AND *ESTHER WATERS*

by

JUDITH ISABEL MITCHELL

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

George Moore's critics have been more than usually content to restrict their comments on his work to straightforward "influence" studies, seeing him as a mere cipher, a slate upon which all the trends of his time were written. Such criticism tends to reduce Moore's early novels, in particular, to mere pastiches, collections of borrowed passages, and generally reveals more about the originals than about the works themselves.

This thesis attempts to examine the artistic value, without neglecting the "influential" value, of the three realistic novels of Moore's early period: *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), *A Drama in Muslin* (1886) and *Esther Waters* (1894). These three novels are fine works of art in their own right, quite apart from what they reveal about the cross-currents of literary influence between France and England near the end of the nineteenth century. *A Mummer's Wife* is a complex and powerful literary creation as well as the first English novel to display the influence of French naturalism; *A Drama in Muslin* is a richly-textured Victorian "social" novel as well as the first English novel to display the influence of French symbolism; and *Esther Waters* is an almost perfect blend of naturalism into the Victorian tradition to produce a novel which is both "modern" and a fine instance of English realism.

This study shows, among other things, that Moore was closer to the English fictional tradition than has been generally supposed, that even in the first part of his novel-writing career he modified Zola's naturalistic formula in complex and subtle ways, that he could write a successful Victorian "society" novel complete with a sympathetic omniscient narrator, and that all three of these novels (which have female main characters, a fact which has interesting feminist implications) are comparable in artistic quality to many better-known Victorian novels.

Such an independent assessment of *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* is needed both to demonstrate the artistic strengths of these hitherto-neglected novels, and to place George Moore in the literary context he demands.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> I happened to come upon the scene at the right moment. I was present at the beginning of an important artistic and literary rebirth. I came to France, I wrote the first serious novels in English.
>
> George Moore in a recorded conversation in the unpublished notes of Mr. Barrett H. Clark[1]

In his own day, George Moore was not particularly well received by his reviewers. His early novels (1883-94) were systematically refused by Smith's and Mudie's because of their frank discussion of sexual matters, and later *The Brook Kerith* (1916) was attacked because of its unconventional handling of religious matters.[2] English critics, constantly on the lookout for the moral in the story, found only *Esther Waters* to be of literary value (and even that novel was blacklisted until Prime Minister Gladstone publicly commended it in *The Westminster Gazette*).[3] Arthur Symons, Moore's friend and fellow-enthusiast for French literary causes in England, was one of the few contemporary critics who admired the artistic quality of his work.[4] Moore was suspected of being a woman, partly because of the name "George" (which, as Compton Mackenzie points out, "was the favourite name for women who donned the breeches when they sat down at their desks"),[5] but partly also because, by current (late Victorian) standards, his novels were considered "unmanly." During his Irish period, particularly in *Hail and Farewell*, Moore managed to insult, publicly, almost everyone he knew, later causing Yeats to remark somewhat acerbically that "it was George Moore's own fault that everybody hated him except a few London painters."[6] The style which finally evolved out of his prose experiments, his unique "melodic line," was too esoteric to be widely appreciated, demanding a new kind of appreciation; Shane Leslie commented that "Up to 1900 everybody pretended he had not read George Moore, while under King Edward all pretended they had!"[7]

Moore's indifferent literary reputation continued until Malcolm Brown's *George Moore: A Reconsideration* was published in 1955. Since then, Moore studies have undergone a revival. Apart from Jean C. Noël's massive and comprehensive *George Moore: l'homme et l'oeuvre (1852-1933)* (1966), there are two collections of critical essays: *George Moore's Mind and Art* (1968), edited by Graham Owens, and *The Man of Wax: Critical Essays on George Moore* (1971), edited by Douglas A. Hughes. Several book-length studies on Moore have also been written, as well as important articles by critics of late Victorian literature such as Graham Hough and A. Norman Jeffares. With Edwin Gilcher's *Bibliography of George Moore* (1970), the tools for Moore research were complete. They also include the major biographical work on Moore, Joseph Hone's *Life of George Moore* (1936), Charles Morgan's *Epitaph on George Moore* (1935), and such biographical tid-bits as Susan Mitchell's *George Moore* (1916), and Nancy Cunard's *George Moore: Memories of GM* (1957). Many collections of Moore's letters have been published, including John Eglinton's *Letters of George Moore* (1942) and *Letters from George Moore to Edouard Dujardin 1886-1922* (1929), Rupert Hart-Davis's *George Moore: Letters to Lady Cunard 1895-1933* (1957) and, most recently, Helmut E. Gerber's *George Moore in Transition: Letters to T. Fisher Unwin and Lena Milman, 1894-1910* (1968). Helmut Gerber has also published a valuable secondary bibliography on Moore in *English Literature in Transition* (Vol. II, no. 2, parts I and II, 1959; Vol. III, no. 2, 1960; Vol. IV, no. 2, 1961, and continuing). In addition to these aids to Moore scholarship, there are variorum editions—

particularly useful in Moore's case because of his many revisions—of *Confessions of a Young Man*,[8] *Esther Waters*,[9] and *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa*.[10]

Critics are beginning to realize that despite his failures (and there were many), Moore is far from being the "minor novelist" Cooke and Stevenson list him as in their *English Literature of the Victorian Period*.[11] In an article on "Rediscovering George Moore," Martin Seymour-Smith describes him as "the most neglected of all modern writers."[12] In fact, although his contemporaries were unable to recognize it, Moore made lasting and important contributions to the development of the English novel, as well as to other literary genres such as impressionistic criticism, fictional autobiography and the short story. Charles Morgan, who was originally to do Moore's biography[13] and who displays a sensitive understanding of Moore's work, goes so far as to claim that "Twice George Moore re-created the English novel—first in 1894 when *Esther Waters* gave us our liberty, and again ten years later when there began that series of tales, extending from *The Lake* through *The Brook Kerith* to *Aphrodite in Aulis*. . . ."[14] Morgan's claim, I believe, is justified, and his observation is accurate. Moore's career as a novelist contained two artistically successful periods: his early period, in which he was writing out of both the French and the established Victorian traditions, and his final period, in which he perfected his markedly individual "melodic line." The periods between include some intriguing novels (such as *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* and *The Lake*), but these consist mainly of experiments leading toward the later work.

In this thesis, I shall consider the earliest of these periods. It begins with Moore's first novel, *A Modern Lover*, in 1883 and ends with *Esther Waters* in 1894. Between these two dates Moore also wrote *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), *A Drama in Muslin* (1886), *A Mere Accident* (1887), *Spring Days* (1888), *Mike Fletcher* (1889) and *Vain Fortune* (1891). In particular, I shall examine the three best works of the period, *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters*. The reasons for my summary treatment of the other five novels are that, first, they are very bad novels, and second, they arise out of a quite different set of enthusiasms from the three successful ones.

Moore chronicled the various enthusiasms of this early period in *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888), the audacious fictional autobiography which Enid Starkie sees as "the first stone—even the base—of the aesthetic novel in England."[15] In 1879, after the publication of his first volume of poetry, *Flowers of Passion* (1878), Moore read a series of articles by Zola in the *Voltaire*, in which the French writer outlined the principles of naturalism. Moore was instantly impressed:

> *Naturalisme, la vérité, la science,* were repeated some half-a-dozen times. Hardly able to believe my eyes, I read that you should write, with as little imagination as possible, that plot in a novel or in a play was illiterate and puerile, and that the art of M. Scribe was an art of strings and wires, etc. I rose up from breakfast, ordered my coffee, and stirred the sugar, a little dizzy, like one who has received a violent blow on the head. . . . And now for a third time I experienced the pain and joy of a sudden and inward light.

> Naturalism, truth, the new art, above all the phrase, "the new art," impressed me as with a sudden sense of light. . . . The idea of a new art based upon science, in opposition to the art of the old world that was based on imagination, an art that should explain all things and embrace modern life in its entirety, in its endless ramifications, be, as it were, a new creed in a new civilisation, filled me with wonder, and I stood dumb before the vastness of the conception, and the towering height of the ambition.[16]

After this Moore went back to London from France in 1880 with the intention of "digging a dagger into the heart of the sentimental school" and of becoming "Zola's offshoot in England."[17] This burst of enthusiasm was seemingly short-lived, however. In 1884, the year before *A Mummer's Wife* was published and six years before Wilde reached similar conclusions in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Moore favourably reviewed Huysmans' *A Rebours*, the book in which Huysmans turned against naturalism and toward symbolism. In his review, entitled "A Curious Book," Moore sees this novel as "neither more nor less than a catalogue of the whimsical fantasies of this product of over-civilization. . . . Three hundred pages are filled, and admirably, with matter it is true of little interest, but with graces of fancy, imagination, and caprice that never fail to delight the literary *gourmet*."[18] In 1885, as he was correcting the proofs for *A Drama in Muslin*, Moore read Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*, and experienced yet another "echo-augury," calling it "the book to which I owe the last temple in my soul," which "came upon me almost with the same strength, almost as intensely, as that divine song of the flesh,—*Mademoiselle de Maupin*." In particular, he was delighted by "the simple and unaffected joy of the heart of natural things," the "beauty of mildness in life," the "glad worship of the visible world," the "incurable belief that the beauty of material things is sufficient for all the needs of life," and a "genuine pleasure in the language itself": "'Marius' was the stepping-stone that carried me across the channel into the genius of my own tongue."[19] Later, in 1887, he read with interest Edouard Dujardin's *Les lauriers sont coupés*, an early experiment with interior monologue and Joyce's acknowledged prototype for his "stream-of-consciousness" novels. In 1888, as well as *Confessions of a Young Man*, Moore published an admiring article on Turgenev in *The Fortnightly Review*, in which he lauded Turgenev's "subtlety" and came to "a more comprehensible classification of novelists than has hitherto been attempted—the thought school and the fact school," Zola being relegated to the latter for the reason implied in an alleged remark by Turgenev about Gervaise: "*Je me demande qu'est-ce que cela peut me faire si elle sue au milieu du dos ou sou les bras?*"[20]

Thus, as Malcolm Brown points out, Moore's opinion of Zola changed within a very short time. In his Preface to the English edition of *Pot-Bouille* (published in 1885, the same year as the revelation of Marius), Moore calls Zola "a great epic poet, . . . the Homer of modern life"; in *Confessions* (1888), he dismisses him as "the dregs of yesterday's champagne."[21] Moore goes on in *Confessions* to say that "What I reproach Zola with is that he has no style; there is nothing you won't find in Zola from Chateaubriand to the reporting in the *Figaro*. He seeks immortality in an exact description of a linendraper's shop; if the shop conferred immortality it should be upon the linendraper who created the shop, and not on the novelist who described it."[22] Because of Moore's derogatory remarks about naturalism in *Confessions*, in fact, Zola refused to write the Preface for the French edition of *A Mummer's Wife* (1888) as he had previously agreed to do. Moore was to return later to naturalistic methods in *Esther Waters*, but in the same year in which *Esther* was published (1894), he wrote the Preface to Lena Milman's English translation of Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*, extolling the latter's "minor key," "skilful use of anti-climax" and "sad and solemn harmony,"[23] none of which are particularly naturalistic attributes.

Broadly speaking, then, there were two main impulses in Moore's early period; as Enid Starkie points out, Moore at this stage wanted to follow both naturalism and "l'art pour l'art."[24] He was caught, seemingly, between the gate of ivory and the gate of horn.[25] What these two schools had in common, as Graham Hough observes, was the premise that art is amoral—both desired to free art from the service of conventional morality.[26] Hough goes on to say that

> The fact is that naturalism did not drive out the aestheticism, it substituted a new aestheticism of an extended kind. . . . [Moore] re-reads *L'Assommoir,* and is impressed by its "strength, height and decorative grandeur," by the "immense harmonic development of the idea, and the fugal treatment of the different scenes," by "the lordly, river-like roll of the narrative." In short, it was "the idea of the new aestheticism . . . that captivated him. . . . By now, when the professed "scientific" pretensions of *Le Roman Expérimental*

> can no longer be taken seriously, the real nature of Zola's achievement can be seen more clearly, and it is seen much as Moore saw it."[27]

In Moore's early period, however, regardless of the many theses written on his "aesthetic naturalism" or "naturalistic aestheticism," these two tendencies are not yet integrated as they were to be in his later style. The five unsuccessful novels written before 1894 represent Moore's earliest attempt to write symbolist or "aesthetic" novels.[28] Lewis Seymour of *A Modern Lover*, Frank Escott of *Spring Days*, Mike Fletcher, and to some extent Hubert Price of *Vain Fortune*, are all recognizable as the type of jaded, fin-de-siècle dandy that was to become so fashionable in the nineties, while the ascetic John Norton of *A Mere Accident* has the same fastidious contempt for the world as Des Esseintes. Moore's fatuous young men, who are similar in many ways to the audacious hero of *The Confessions of a Young Man*, generally do not make successful heroes of novels. They are interesting mainly as an indication of what Moore himself was like during this period—Duret described him as "a golden-haired fop, an aesthete before the days of Wilde"[29]--and as evidence of the superficiality of Moore's aestheticism at this time. Only two of these novels merit any critical attention. Richard Ellman has posited *Vain Fortune* as Joyce's source for "The Dead" (Joyce called it "the only one of George Moore's books worth reading"),[30] and *Spring Days*, which was originally serialized in *The Evening News*, is a genuinely amusing satire, despite Richard Cave's assertion that it is "a trivial, repetitive piece and certainly [Moore's] worst work of fiction."[31] None of these early aesthetic novels was successful, however, either artistically or commercially, and none was included in Moore's canon. As Peter Ure remarks, Moore "could little bear in later years to speak of [these] novels. . . , nor shall we,"[32] except for my brief discussion of them in the "Interchapter" between Chapter III and Chapter IV.

The remaining three novels, the "realistic" novels which I intend to discuss, have female main characters. These heroines are each from a different social background: Kate Ede is lower middle class, Alice Barton upper class and Esther Waters working class. There is an astonishing difference between these serious, believable, carefully-drawn heroines and the mock-cynical bohemian "types" who are the heroes of the aesthetic novels and who reflect the alternate self-mockery and self-aggrandizement which constituted Moore's own pose during this period. In fact, none of Moore's works (except possibly *The Brook Kerith*) include a strong realistic male hero. This ability to portray female main characters more successfully and convincingly than male main characters can probably be traced to one of the major obsessions of Moore's career: his lack of sexual success with women. This manifested itself in his work in various ways: much of *Hail and Farewell* has to do with the question of Moore's impotence, and many of his short stories (particularly those in *Celibates* [1895], *In Single Strictness* [1922] and *Celibate Lives* [1927]) portrayed characters who were similarly unsuccessful in love. Apart from manifesting itself in these fairly obvious thematic concerns, however, Moore's sexual/

psychological make-up put him in a unique position in regard to women: he felt a genuine "feminine" affinity with them (in the French edition of *Confessions* he writes "je ne puis qu'imaginer qu'avant ma naissance il y avait eu quelque hésitation de sexe"),[33] and he tended to be a friend and confidant to women rather than a lover, thereby acquiring a more feminine and uninhibited insight into the workings of the female mind. This imaginative sympathy with women is exhibited in the many felicitous female characters who populate Moore's work, including the three I have chosen to study (Mildred Lawson/Henrietta Marr, for example, rivals Ibsen's Hedda Gabler as a portrait of a sterile domineering female), and belies the mere connoisseur's interest in women Moore affects in later editions of *Confessions*.[34] His early readers found this psychological accuracy somewhat disturbing; Susan Mitchell called it "an almost uncanny insight into a woman's being,"[35] and Andrew Lang complained that the naturalists (Moore among them) had an "almost unholy knowledge of the nature of women. . . . Such analysis . . . makes one feel intrusive and unmanly."[36] If women have independent natures, in other words, it is best not to know. Moore's fasination with the female sex made him want to know, however, and the earliest results of this knowledge are his three realistic heroines in *A Mummer's Wife, A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters*.

Of these three novels, only *Esther Waters* has received much critical acclaim. Some critics, unable to appreciate Moore's later achievements, consider it to be the culmination of his career. However, the other two novels in this group also merit critical attention.

W. C. Frierson maintains that *A Mummer's Wife* is "an excellent piece of work, of far more distinction than the dull *Esther Waters* that later caught the public's attention,"[37] and Norman Jeffares refers to *A Drama In Muslin* as an "unreasonably neglected novel."[38] And, although they belong to the same "group" in Moore's corpus, John Freeman was able to see as early as 1922 that *A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin* were not merely preparations for *Esther Waters*, but independent novels.[39] Whether or not one agrees with Peter Ure that "there is a Moore heroine of whom Kate, Alice and Esther are only avatars,"[40] these three novels are interesting on their own merits.

It is on their own merits that I intend to examine them. The question of influence, which inevitably arises, is a particularly curious one in relation to Moore, and needs clarification at the outset. In "George Moore: A Centenary Appreciation," Charles Morgan remarks that "There was and still is a problem of George Moore; or, rather, there are two problems, personal and literary, which are connected."[41] The way in which these two problems are connected is instructive with regard to the issue of Moore's literary influences. Zola remarked that art is "nature seen through a temperament" ("une oeuvre ne sera jamais qu'un coin de la nature vu à travers un tempérament").[42] Moore's "temperament," however, was somewhat of a puzzle. Ruth Zabriskie Temple, speaking of Moore's references to French literature, says that although such references "pretend to be no more than a record of the impact of that literature on a temperament, this temperament was for various reasons a singularly sensitive instrument."[43] The "various reasons" include the fact that Moore remained strangely unformed—uneducated, even—until his twenties (to use his own over-quoted phrase, he "came into the world apparently with a nature like a smooth piece of wax, bearing no impress, but capable of receiving any")[44] and the fact that his formative years, "the years the most impressionable, from twenty to thirty, when the senses and the mind are widest awake"[45] were spent in Paris in the seventies, when the artistic ferment of the various schools of naturalism, symbolism and impressionism was well under way. Moore's childlike delight in each of the "influences" which impressed themselves upon him (recorded in the successive "echo auguries" documented in *Confessions*, which I have already outlined) seems very far removed from "the inevitable temptations to paralysis or routine imitation, to retrenchment or mere fitful rebellion" outlined by W. Jackson Bate in *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*,[46] and farther yet from Harold Bloom's description of the creative artist's "anxiety of influence."[47] Indeed, Moore's innocence in this respect seems much like Bloom's description of Ben Jonson's attitude: he "has no anxiety as to imitation, for to him (refreshingly) art is *hard work*."[48] Even when one is sure that Moore read and was "influenced" by a work, his confessed haphazard method of reading further complicates the issue:

> I can lay no claim to scholarship of any kind; for save life I could never learn anything correctly. I am a student only of ball rooms, bar rooms, streets, and alcoves. I have read very little; but all I read I can turn to account, and all I read I remember. To read freely, extensively, has always been my ambition, and my utter inability to study has always been to me a subject

> of grave inquietude,—study as contrasted with a general and haphazard gathering of ideas taken in flight.[49]

A single-minded artist such as Zola, to whom an opinion was "like a heavy piece of furniture; . . . moved with difficulty,"[50] could not understand such shifting allegiances. Moore's friend Arthur Symons, who like Moore was in constant touch with the rapidly changing literary currents in both France and England, understood them well. He says in his dedication to Moore in *Studies in Two Literatures* that

> Frankly, I do not understand this limiting of oneself to a school, a doctrine, a costume. I have, and I keep for myself, my own way of seeing things, my own way of trying to say them; you have your own vision of the world, and your own technique. But to you, as to me, whatever has been beautifully wrought, by whatever craftsman, and in whatever manner of working, if only he has been true to himself, to his own way of realizing the things he sees, that, to you as to me, is a work of art; and its recognition, its presentment to other people, who may not immediately have seen it to be what it is, becomes the delightful business of the critic.[51]

Moore's innocent openness to influence (Noël says that "il a conservé quelque chose de l'enthousiasme des enfants qui agissent de primesaut")[52] helps to explain two seeming anomalies which have puzzled his critics: his status as a writer and his "facelessness" in his own work. Bloom remarks that "where generosity is involved, the poets influenced are minor or weaker; the more generosity, . . . the poorer the poets involved."[53] Certainly Moore borrowed "generously" from his literary sources, and this has led critics to doubt his originality. In addition, Moore's ready adherence to the tenets of first one school and then another, and his willingness to be impressed by writers of varying persuasions sometimes make it seem, especially in his early work, as though Moore has no personality or style of his own. Buffon's dictum ("le style, c'est l'homme même")[54] seems strangely inapplicable to Moore before 1895. After this, of course, Moore did develop his own indubitably distinctive style (his "melodic line") and, recognizing that great art is unmistakably but not self-consciously "signed,"[55] proceeded to re-cast all of his earlier work to conform to it. Until recently, however, critics have been unable to get a grasp on Moore the man *or* on Moore the artist. There is no typical early Moore novel as there is, say, a typical Hardy novel or Gissing novel, no consistent narratorial "personality" perceptible in his work. Graham Hough calls Moore "a man without a trademark," and Geraint Goodwin remarks that

> Ibsen's attitude we know; Shakespeare's attitude, as broad as life itself, we yet know was continually changing; Balzac, Dostoieffsky, Tourgenieff, the great minds of the world—but George Moore? . . . Their work was coloured by their attitude, however impersonal they may have kept themselves. But Mr. Moore's work, his creative work . . . has . . . risen up and assumed its own beautiful proportions, betraying the hand but never the heart of its creator.[56]

As a result, one trend in Moore criticism has been to trace influences, treating Moore as a mere cipher, a slate upon which all the trends of his time were written. This in turn tends to reduce his early novels to mere pastiches, collections of borrowed passages, and generally reveals more about the originals than about the works themselves.

Occasionally, of course, one can spot a passage or technique that Moore has quite openly "borrowed"—he once said to Lady Gregory, "We both quote well, but you always put inverted commas, I never do"[57]—but this does not say much about the work as a whole. Milton Chaikin's discoveries in *A Mummer's Wife* of echoes of *Thérèse Raquin*, *L'Assommoir*, *Nana* and *Une Page d'Amour*, for example,[58] are of limited interest in relation to that novel's intrinsic value. As Noël remarks, "Il importe de souligner ces différences aussi bien que les resemblances."[59] My primary purpose in this thesis, therefore, will not be to trace specific influences—this has been done, and done well.[60] The doing of it, in fact, has led to the state of affairs described by Charles Burkhart in his recent succinct review of Moore scholarship: "The new criticism is old now, but it has nearly bypassed Moore."[61]

This thesis is partly an attempt to remedy this situation with regard to Moore's three realistic novels. I will examine each novel as a text in its own right from the point of view of fairly conventional "new critical" notions of narration, character, plot, style and structure, thus permitting an evaluation of their relative merits quite apart from their status as "copies" of various predecessors.

Another part of my task will be to "place" *A Mummer's Wife, A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* according to their importance in Moore's career, thus helping to "place" Moore in the history of English literature, especially novel history. Apart from his "cold and clammy personality," Frierson remarks, "there are many other reasons why Moore has been omitted from critical discussions, not least among which is the difficulty of placing him satisfactorily."[62] This is borne out by the continuing puzzlement of critics such as Walter Allen, who refers to Moore as "something of a sport"[63] in the tradition of the English novel; and even Charles Burkhart acknowledges that "One special problem with Moore is that he is either a major minor writer or a minor major writer; it would be easier if he were simply major or simply minor."[64]

In order to "place" Moore's contribution, or rather contributions, to the development of the English novel, however, one must take into account the time during which he wrote, and in this sense "influence" in the large sense is important to my study. In 1884, when the famous "Art of Fiction" debate was taking place between James and Besant and novelists were becoming intensely aware of the novel as an art form, Moore was at the very beginning of his novel-writing career. The period that encompassed *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* immediately preceded the unravelling of the Victorian novel into many strands: soon there would be the romantic adventure novels of Haggard and Stevenson, the "English naturalist" novels of Gissing, Maugham and Morrison, the "aesthetic" novels of Wilde and Beardsley, the "novels of ideas" of Wells and Bennett and the "well-made" novels of Henry James, as well as the late Victorian novels of Hardy and Meredith.[65] Moore did not belong to any of these groups, but characteristics of most of them can be seen in his work, despite his avowed disaffection with the English novel as a whole.[66] I have already alluded to Moore's fascination with the various literary "movements" in France, and, while it is possibly overstating the case to say with Enid Starkie that "Everything that was most vital and original in English fiction, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, came from France,"[67] it is certainly true that French ideas, and particularly those of the naturalists, changed the course of the English novel. That Moore was a key figure in bringing about this change there is no doubt. As Graham Hough remarks, "We can see in him a complete microcosm of the French influences that were then reshaping English literature. His experience tells us of the opening of a new chapter in the history of English fiction."[68]

My discussion of Moore's realistic novels will therefore take place within a broad historical context, with particular attention to "French" and "English" characteristics. Since at this particular time in the development of the English novel these two sets of characteristics were virtually synonymous with "naturalist" and "Victorian," these are two terms I shall define at this point in the senses in which I will be using them.

"Naturalism," Milton Chaiken says, is "realist fiction that is materialist, determinist, pessimistic, and documentary. Zola's fiction . . . must be used as the touchstone for the literary type known as naturalism."[69] This definition, though brief, lists most of the main characteristics of naturalism. It was a definite movement or "school" in France which grew out of nineteenth-century realism[70] and which was basically an attempt to apply the methods of nineteenth-century science (particularly the theories of Charles Darwin and Auguste Comte via Claude Bernard and Hippolyte Taine)[71] to literature. It is said to have begun with Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* in 1867[72] (although both Roland Stromberg and Lyall Powers suggest the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* [1864] as the earliest naturalist novel),[73] and indeed Zola was its most renowned exponent (other members of *Le Groupe de Médan* included Paul Alexis, Henry Céard, Léon Hennique, Joris-Karl Huysmans and Guy de Maupassant).

Flaubert, regarded by the naturalists as their immediate ancestor, supplied the group with two of their most important tenets: the impersonality of the narrator ("The artist ought to be in his work like God in creation, invisible and omnipotent. He should be felt everywhere but not be seen")[74] and the notion of character as "type" ("Art is not made for the depiction of exceptions. . . .").[75] The latter tendency, as Martin Turnell points out, was a general trend in French literature of the time: "In the second half of the nineteenth century the French novel underwent far-reaching changes. . . . The individual begins to lose his reality, to be transformed into a symbol or a case. Interest shifts from man to his environment; there is a new emphasis on society, on social groups, on class and, ultimately, on 'the masses.'"[76]

These two principles suited the scientific purpose of naturalism well, as we can see from Zola's Preface to the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin* (considered to be one of the most important "manifestos" of naturalism):

> In *Thérèse Raquin* my aim has been to study temperaments and not characters. That is the whole point of the book. I have chosen people completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by the inexorable laws of their physical nature. Thérèse and Laurent are human animals, nothing more. . . . There is a complete absence of soul, I freely admit, since that is how I meant it to be. I hope that by now it is becoming clear that my object has been first and foremost a scientific one. When my two characters, Thérèse and Laurent, were created, I set myself certain problems and solved them for the interest of the thing. . . . If the novel is read with care, it will be seen that each chapter is a study of a curious physiological case. . . . I simply applied to two living bodies the analytical method that surgeons apply to corpses.[77]

In particular, the naturalist novelist was to examine objectively the effects of environment and heredity on such "temperaments," which were almost invariably drawn from the lower classes. Also, the novelist was to employ the methods of the scientist in researching his material: he was to document carefully all of the concrete details of a particular milieu (being concerned with factual observations only) and overlook none of them, not even the most unpleasant.

Even from this sketchy list of the elements of naturalism, it is obvious that Moore was the only English novelist who at any time could be said to have adopted all of them to any significant extent. Charles Reade[78] employed a "documentary technique" in researching material for his novels, George Eliot[79] portrayed humble subjects and paid careful attention to the details of milieu, Thomas Hardy displayed a pessimistic determinism (especially in his later work), Henry James[80] espoused the naturalistic precept of the disappearance of the narrator, and George

Gissing depicted lower-class characters in squalid surroundings; but in other respects these novelists demonstrated characteristics that were far from naturalistic. Even the so-called "English naturalists," as I shall show, did not follow the naturalistic formula as closely as Moore did in some of his early work.

With due regard for Ruth Zabriskie Temple's article "Truth in Labelling: Pre-Raphaelitism, Aestheticism, Decadence, Fin de siècle,"[81] I am now going to define in passing the general term "symbolist-aesthetic" as the counter movement against naturalism which occurred in France in the 1880's and which looked back toward the decadence of Gautier and Baudelaire. The main differences between the two schools lay in their subject-matter (the symbolist-aesthetes chose exotic subjects rather than low-life ones) and in their concern with form (the symbolist-aesthetes saw the novel as an art object rather than as a scientific document). They were similar, however, in the importance they attached to physical phenomena and in their desire to "place the demands of art outside and above moral exigencies," as Graham Hough observes. ("The movement may be towards fantasy and dream, or it may be towards the recognition of the most sordid social actualities; but these . . . are both expressions of the same need.")[82]

As I have already pointed out, Moore's "aestheticism" during this time (including his interest in Huysmans, Dujardin and Pater, his dandified pose in *Confessions* and his ill-wrought "aesthetic" novels) was a strand in his artistic development running side by side with, but distinct from, his naturalism. In addition, it is apparent that

Moore's aestheticism during this early period was as yet undeveloped. In *Confessions* he disparagingly says, "What is symbolism? Vulgarly speaking, saying the opposite to what you mean,"[83] and Holbrook Jackson remarks that

> George Moore played at decadence for a little while, but the real influences of his life were Flaubert and the naturalists on the one side, and their corollaries in the graphic arts, Manet and the impressionists, on the other. For the rest he insisted upon England accepting the impressionists; abandoned realism; introduced into this country the work of Verlaine and Rimbaud, and the autobiography of indiscretion; flirted with the Irish literary movement, and its vague mysticism—and remained George Moore.[84]

In describing his return to London from Paris in 1880, Moore recounts that he carried symbolism "like a toy revolver in my waistcoat pocket, to be used on an emergency."[85] He did not fire this revolver until he wrote *The Lake* in 1905, I think, and by then it was a real one.

The term "Victorian" is not so easy to define as "naturalism" or "symbolism," as the English were not inclined to codify their literary movements. In the sense in which I will be using it, "Victorian" will refer to what is commonly thought of as "English realism."
W. C. Frierson gives a list of Victorian characteristics—"We associate with Victorianism the belief in 'higher selves' and 'lower selves,' a concern with spiritual values and free will, a tendency to look on the sunny side of doubt as well as of life, reticence in matters of sex, religious patronage, a chivalric attitude toward woman, Toryism, pride of race, and imperialism"[86]—but these deal almost exclusively with the

"matter" of Victorian fiction and ignore its form. In addition, Frierson is obviously referring to the older generation of Victorians. Clarence Decker and Walter Allen both agree that the later great Victorian novelists were by no means as complacent as all that.[87] Perhaps a better way to approach the Victorian novel is by way of Lionel Stevenson's article "The Rationale of Victorian Fiction." He speaks of "three compelling requirements" of the Victorian novel: it was to tell "an entertaining story," it was to contain "an impressive accumulation of familiar detail" in order to create verisimilitude, and it was to supply "a reassuring sense of consistent [moral] principles."[88] Of these requirements, the first and third refer to the dictum that literature was to "delight and instruct," a double duty which Victorian novelists took very seriously. Trollope, writing about "Novel Reading" in *Nineteenth Century*, says that

> The writer of stories must please, or he will be nothing. And he must teach, whether he wish to teach or not. . . . If he can make virtue alluring and vice ugly, while he charms his reader instead of wearying him, then we think that he should not be spoken of generally as being among those workers of iniquity who do evil in their generation. . . . [There is] a general conviction that it behooves the English novelist to be pure.[89]

The other requirement outlined by Stevenson, the request for "verisimilitude," is interesting. He mentions that Dickens "spied on Yorkshire schools in preparation for *Nicholas Nickleby* and sojourned in strikebound Preston for *Hard Times*" and that George Eliot "depended on parliamentary reports and old newspaper files as her quarry for

Middlemarch,"[90] and this sounds much like the documentary technique employed by the naturalists, also in the service of verisimilitude. As I have already mentioned in connection with Charles Reade, however, the difference lies partly in the way such information was used; to the naturalists, facts were important in and of themselves, whereas the Victorians generally saw such empirical data as incidental or subordinate to their character's inner states. What we learn about medicine via Lydgate, for instance, is nothing like so important as what we learn about his soul. From the naturalists, on the other hand, as Lilian Furst and Peter Skrine point out, "one can acquire a reasonable, though now out of date knowledge of mining, laundering, farming, the stock-exchange, printing, the manufacture of pottery, wet-nursing, pick-pocketing, cotton-picking and other useful accomplishments."[91]

Another important difference in French and English notions of verisimilitude lies in the "facts" the Victorians saw fit to record; anything not considered "respectable" (I shall deal more fully with this presently) was simply omitted. Stevenson contends that such omissions actually contributed to verisimilitude:

> What modern readers condemn out of hand as biased prudery or cowardly evasiveness is actually close to the processes of real experience. In everyday life we do not usually witness the secret episodes of sexual intercourse or psychological disturbance; instead, we draw our conclusions from the evidence that shows to the external observer.[92]

This, of course, is a weak argument. In everyday life we do not usually know what other people are thinking, either, unless they tell us; but the Victorian novelist cheerfully admits us to their consciousness.

This brings me to J. Hillis Miller's conception of the defining characteristic of Victorian fiction, the omniscient narrator. "This convention," says Hillis Miller, "is so crucial to nineteenth-century English fiction . . . that it may be called the determining principle of its form."[93] Indeed, the omniscient narrator, with his broad knowledge of "how things go," is ideally suited to fulfill all of the Victorian reader's expectations: he could tell a good story, he could create a real "world" peopled with real characters, and in so doing he could impart moral wisdom, either in his own voice or through the lessons implicit in his plot. And such a narrator would also undoubtedly exhibit many of the conservative "Victorian" qualities outlined by Frierson.

From this bewildering array of disparate characteristics emerge some central differences between French naturalistic and Victorian realistic fiction, to which many of the other differences may be linked. One of these central differences is outlined by Walter Allen in *The English Novel From 1881 to 1914*:

> Moore remains almost the only English Naturalist in the French sense. For the Naturalist theory stressed an attitude towards character endemic to French novelists but rare in English. It was Flaubert who said: "Art is not made to paint the exceptions", and he added that the characters most suited to fiction were the "more general" because they were the more typical. This is not the English view, which is implied in the very ambiguity of

> the word "character" in our language. It may mean, simply, an imaginary person invented by a novelist; but it may also mean a person distinguished by odd behaviour, an eccentric. We call a man of strongly marked idiosyncracy a "character"; and English novelists have always tended to see their imaginary persons as eccentric persons; the two meanings constantly overlap. The French, however, rarely see their characters as "characters". . . . For the English, there is always a tendency for character to be an end in itself, valuable in its own right; the French are interested in a character as the instance of a general law or because a general law may be deduced from it. . . . The theory of Naturalism, with its preoccupation with the unexceptional, the representative, reinforced the French in that inherited disposition. But it cut right across the grain of the English; so that, between the mid-eighties and 1914, while there is plenty of realism in English fiction there is little true Naturalism.[94]

These differing notions of "character" are undoubtedly one of the issues on which the naturalists and the Victorian realists held widely differing opinions. Following Flaubert, the naturalists (with varying degrees of success, as I shall show) attempted to put into practice the belief that art was "not meant to depict exceptions." Victorian novelists believed no such thing. When they did attempt to write naturalistic novels in the nineties, for example—novels dealing with the seamy side of lower-class existence—they invariably "individualized" their characters (made "characters" of them): Morrison's Dicky Perrott and Lizerunt, Kipling's Badalia Herodsfoot and Maugham's Liza Kemp are all idiosyncratic and generally fairly likeable characters with whom the reader can easily identify. Environment, rather than heredity, is obviously at fault; we are given the distinct impression that these characters are vicious only because they don't know any better and that (unlike Gervaise, for example) given half a chance, they would be decent citizens. At the very least, they are endowed with a remarkable energy and vitality (like Liza), or more often, they have a kind of instinctive moral sense (like Badalia or Dicky Perrott). Frierson notes that

> When Dickens portrayed a thief, a rogue, or a gravedigger he presented him as an individual, an oddity, not a type. . . . What distinguished the portrayal of poverty and depravity among the English followers of Zola during the nineties, however, was that whole classes of people did not differ materially from the individuals selected for inspection. A rogue was associated with other rogues, with a great many rogues, and when they were put all together they didn't look at all comical. Depravity was still presented in a lively manner and the depraved were hardly conscious of their sins. But there is something just a little bit ghastly in the good-humored delineation of a social infection. Moreover poor people, not very much unlike, were grouped together, and their social situation was evaluated. So poverty was merely poor and degrading. . . . All this is not naturalism.[95]

The common English complaint that the novels of the French naturalists "lacked humour," therefore, can also be seen as connected to this notion of "character": the only way of rendering the deleterious effects of heredity and environment on lower-class characters in a humourous way is in precisely the way that Frierson suggests.[96] As Furst and Skrine point out, "In the last resort, the English writers remained true to their own tradition of a realism spiced with humour and keenly aware of human oddities with only an occasional passing glance at naturalism."[97]

Quite predictably, the English notion of "character" extended to the novelists themselves. Earlier in his book, Frierson remarks that "Naturalism, even a rather decorous naturalism, . . . was not altogether successful in England because it necessitated that the novelist be impersonal, or at least objective. The naturalistic novelist must hold aloof from his characters, and England did not see the necessity."[98] The partisan omniscient narrator, who embodied all of the characteristics most integral to the Victorian novel, was not easily relinquished by Victorian readers. As I have pointed out, Moore's lack of "character" in this respect did nothing to further his reputation as an English novelist.

The most common objection to naturalistic fiction raised by English readers and critics, however, seems to have had little to do with anything so innocuous as character: French fiction was pronounced "immoral." There are some interesting discrepancies here, though. Walter Allen concludes his account of French and English notions of "character" by saying that "Perhaps this is to say that whereas the French on the whole write as moralists the English write as humourists."[99] Surely this is not so, as any Victorian critic would confirm, "morality" being one of the chief virtues of the Victorian novel.

What, then, did the English mean when they condemned French fiction as "immoral"? The most obvious answer is "having to do with sexual matters"—Harry Levin puts it nicely when he says that "Mrs. Grundy equated 'realistic' with 'Pornographic.'"[100] The two most obvious instances of this usage that spring to mind are Tennyson's well-known lines about the "troughs of Zolaism"—

> Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of your sewer;
> Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream should issue pure.
>
> Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism,—
> Forward, forward, ay and backward, downward, too, into the abysm[101]

—and Miss Crawford's "mantling blush": "How can we expect the young to escape from spring blights if that beautiful and natural guard against them, the sense which calls the mantling blush to the cheek, is broken down by literature that is wantonly prurient?"[102] Just how different the French attitude is can be seen in Zola's blunt statement that

> Our French girls, whose training and education are deplorable . . . are the product of this idiot literature in which a young maiden is deemed the more noble the closer she is to being a well wound up mechanical doll. Oh, educate our girls, fashion them for us and for the life they will have to lead, put them in touch as quickly as possible with the realities of existence; that will be an excellent task.[103]

But the objection was also wider than this. When the Victorian reviewers accused Zola of "wallowing in filth," "vice" or "bestiality," they also had in mind his frank and detailed descriptions of the physical squalor in which his characters lived. A writer for the *Fortnightly Review* in 1888 says that "the objection to the new French morality or immorality is not so much that it is immoral as that it is so utterly unamusing and unpleasant,"[104] and a writer for *Society* the same year calls the new French realism "dirt and horror pure and simple."[105]

In other words, almost any candid rendering of either sexuality or unpleasant physical details—any emphasis on man's "animal" nature as opposed to his "human" nature—was considered to be "immoral," "disgusting" and "sordid" (and when I use the word "sordid" in the following chapters I will be using it in this context). English writers had dealt with lower-class subjects before, but they had avoided "sordidness" by suffusing such subjects with humour or pathos (as Dickens did) or with piety and respectability (as Mrs. Gaskell did). W. S. Lilly neatly summarized the reason for this dread of the physical in "The New Naturalism," describing the "Naturalistic Evolution" as "the banishing from life of all that gives it glory and honour: the victory of fact over principle, of mechanism over imagination, of appetites, dignified as rights, over duties, of sensation over intellect, of the belly over the heart, of fatalism over moral freedom, of brute force over justice, in a word, of matter over mind."[106]

Given all of these accusations, then, what does Allen mean when he says that the French "on the whole write as moralists"? Ferdinand Brunetière, who closely studied the differences in French and English literature at the end of the nineteenth century, answers this question succinctly in his cogent and insightful article "On the Essential Characteristic of French Literature." The great aim of French literature, he says,

> is not to analyse states of the soul, or to represent extraordinary situations, but to depict "morals," and especially "conditions." The good French novels mirror society. . . . Neither exceptions nor singularities attracted [the great French writers]. Their only wish was to treat of man in general, or, as we still say, universal man, bound by the social ties of the human race. . . . The questions which our writers discuss by preference are concerned with the essential interests of social man. The social institution being for them the most wonderful phenomenon in the world, all their thoughts are directed towards it, and that is why the expressions of their ideas concerning it cannot be indifferent to any one. . . . The severest reproach French literature had to fear was that of eccentricity, for the simple reason that its principal aim was to perfect or reform the social institution.[107]

To the French novelists, then, "morality" had to do with man's social (as opposed to his individual) conscience. The naturalists continued this tradition, supplementing it with the new notions of scientific method. The accurate description and diagnosis of social corruption (an activity which is hardly conducive to optimism, humour or happy endings), they felt, was the primary task of the novelist as a scientific observer of human nature. In "The Experimental Novel," Zola states this moral purpose of the naturalists very clearly:

> This is what constitutes the experimental novel: to possess a knowledge of the mechanism of the phenomena inherent in man, to show the machinery of his intellectual and sensory manifestations, under the influences of heredity and environment, such as physiology shall give them to us, and then finally to exhibit man living in social conditions produced by himself, which he modifies daily, and in the heart of which he himself experiences a continual transformation. . . . We are, in a word, experimental moralists, showing by experiment in what way a passion acts in a certain social condition. The day in which we gain control of the mechanism of this passion we can treat it and reduce it, or at least make it as inoffensive as possible. And in

> this consists the practical utility and high morality of our naturalistic works, which experiment on man, and which dissect piece by piece this human machinery in order to set it going through the influence of the environment. . . . In this way we shall construct a practical sociology, and our work will be a help to political and economical sciences. I do not know . . . of a more noble work. . . . To be the master of good and evil, to regulate life, to regulate society, to solve in time all the problems of socialism, above all, to give justice a solid foundation by solving through experiment the questions of criminality—is not this being the most useful and the most moral workers in the human workshop?[108]

Brunetière also sees that this discrepancy in the avowed moral purpose of the two literatures is directly related to the discrepancy in the French and English notions of "character," although he tends to be derogatory about the English notion:

> By comparison with French literature, thus defined and characterized, the English is an individualist literature. . . . You will find that the English only write in order to experience the exterior sensation of their individuality. Hence that "humour," which may be defined as the expression of the pleasure they feel in giving vent to their peculiar thoughts, often in a manner unexpected by themselves. Hence, too, the abundance, diversity, and richness of their lyric vein, since individualism is its real source, and an ode or elegy is the involuntary afflux, as it were, and overflow of the innermost feelings in the poet's soul. . . . Hence, in a work, the nature of their imagination and their sensibility. As if a man's capacity of representing himself and his feelings to another man—as if fantasy, truly so-called, which is the most variable of faculties, constituted the element of most permanent value.[109]

Apart from this "humour," "abundance," "diversity" and "richness," of course, the Victorian reader also expected to receive individual moral instruction, precepts that could be applied to his own character. The kind of moral instruction the reader of a French novel could expect to receive, on the other hand, as Brunetière and Zola point out, had to do with groups instead of individuals; he would have his social consciousness raised in regard to the lower orders of society and be made to see in detail the "scientific" effects on human beings of certain kinds of heredity and environment. Hence the frequent complaint of English critics that naturalistic novels were "pessimistic"; there is no chance of a happy ending when the characters' fates are determined by heredity and environment rather than free will.

By a "Victorian" novel, then, I shall mean one in which the characters are individuals rather than types; in which the technical details of the "milieu" are clearly subordinate to the characters' thoughts and actions; which avoids animalistic physical details which are either sexual or "sordid"; and which teaches a moral lesson, all by means of an omniscient narrator.

Moore's affinities with the English tradition are more difficult to discern than his affinities with the French tradition, mainly because of his avowed and insistent dislike of the English novel. Much of the latter was undoubtedly due to his ardent desire to appear to be a Frenchman. He claims in *Confessions* that "An Englishman was at that time as much out of my mental reach as an Esquimau would be now,"[110] and he affected at one point to have "forgotten" English. The fact is that Moore's French was always, as Stevenson puts it, "more fluent than accurate,"[111] and that he had a translator for the French editions of his novels.

That Moore had read more widely in the English novel than he let on is clear from *Confessions*; by 1888 he had at least read (or said that he had read) James, Meredith, Hardy, Eliot, Miss Braddon and Stevenson. What he objected to the most in the English novel, in addition to its prudish "respectability," was its lack of form:

> In contemporary English fiction I marvel, and I am repeatedly struck by the inability of writers, even of the first-class, to make an organic whole of their stories. . . . When improbability, which in these days does duty for imagination, is mixed with the familiar aspects of life, the result is inchoate and rhythmless folly, I mean the regular and inevitable alternation and combination of pa and ma, and dear Annie who lives at Clapham, with the Mountains of the Moon, and the secret of eternal life; this violation of the first principles of art—that is to say, of the rhythm of feeling and proportion, is not possible in France.[112]

Moore also recognized that the English novel was in need of a new impetus:

> The healthy school is played out in England; all that could be said has been said; the successors of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot have no ideal, and consequently no language; what can be more pudding than the language of Mr. Hardy, and he is typical of a dozen other writers, Mr. Besant, Mr. Murray, Mr. Crawford? The reason of this heaviness of thought and expression is that the avenues are closed, no new subject matter is introduced, the language of English fiction has therefore run stagnant. But if the realists should catch favour in England the English tongue may be saved from dissolution, for with the new subjects they would introduce, new forms of language would arise.[113]

Moore himself was to be a major force in helping the realists to "catch favour" in England. It is my contention that in the three realistic novels of his early period we can observe Moore's most important impact on the form of the English novel: *A Mummer's Wife* is almost perfectly naturalistic, *A Drama in Muslin* is almost perfectly Victorian and *Esther Waters* is an almost perfect blend of these two influences, resulting in a novel that is indubitably more "modern" than most other novels of its day. Graham Hough remarks that, "Whether he knew it or not when writing [*Esther Waters*] Moore had one foot in the Victorian novel while the other was taking a stride forward into the twentieth century."[114] Martin Seymour-Smith agrees, saying that "When Moore is read not simply as a naturalist, but in the modern context he demands, he is a much more rewarding writer."[115] Along with Henry James, then, Moore in his early period was one of the last of the Victorian and the first of the modern novelists. As such, he is immensely interesting and worthy of careful study.

Not least in importance among the "modern" elements of Moore's realistic novels is their feminism. Especially in light of its marked contrast with the male "decadent" theme of the aesthetic novels of this period, the "feminist" theme underlying *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* is significant. Moore's stance in relation to the "New Woman" fiction which was being written at the time is tantalizingly ambiguous; Charles Burkhart asks, "What do feminists make of Moore? *Esther Waters* is grist to the feminist mill: or is it?"[116] and this is one of the issues I will examine. In addition, Lloyd Fernando points out that

> Because his women characters cover the spectrum of English society from working class to upper middle class, they

> represent as an ensemble the most comprehensive response by an English novelist of the period to the issue of women's freedom. The limited success of their careers at different levels stands as a corrective to feminist generalizations. . . . While at the lower and middle levels his observation rings true, the limits of his own abilities as a novelist became increasingly evident as he moved to heroines higher in the social scale.[117]

As I shall show, this is true; of the three heroines Esther Waters is probably the most successfully drawn, while Alice Barton is the least. More importantly, Moore's insights into the feminine psyche and predicament mark a trend toward the modern novel. Gail Cunningham shrewdly remarks that "for this brief period at least [the eighties and nineties] the emancipation of women and the emancipation of the English novel advanced together."[118]

I have chosen to limit myself to Moore's realistic novels of his early period because it seems to me that *Esther Waters* marks Moore's greatest direct contribution to, as well as his break from, the mainstream of the English novel. After that time he experimented (sometimes successfully, sometimes not) with the form of the novel until he finally perfected his "melodic line," a successful but neglected attempt to re-create the novel. As Joyce rightly remarked of it, "[Moore's] new impulse has no kind of relation to the future of art."[119] That future, of course, had to do with James, Conrad and Lawrence, and with Woolf and Joyce himself in their development of the stream-of-consciousness novel. That is not to say that Moore's later work did not affect the future of other genres, however—his *Hail and Farewell* and *The Untilled Field* certainly affected the course of fictional autobiography and the Irish short story, particularly Joyce's *Portrait* and *Dubliners*—and, as Seymour-Smith observes, Moore in his later work at least "deserves credit, which he has never had, for seeing as clearly as any writer of his generation that the art of fiction needed to be developed along quite new lines."[120]

Moore's endless revisions, as Richard Cave remarks, are a recurrent problem for the Moore scholar. R. A. Gettmann points out that Moore revised all of his novels except *Mike Fletcher*.[121] Jay Jernigan, who has also made a study of Moore's revisions,[122] notes that a total of twenty-five published textual versions exist of the eight early novels. Jernigan groups these revisions into three phases: the minor technical and artistic revisions effected within a year or two of publication, the revisions during the 1890's which are concerned mainly with thematic structure, and Moore's later rewriting of all his work to conform to his "melodic line." *A Modern Lover* and *A Drama in Muslin* were revised so completely that they were published under new titles, *Lewis Seymour and Some Women* (1917) and *Muslin* (1914). In this thesis I use the early revised editions of *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* (1886, 1886 and 1899). These early versions are the most appropriate for my purpose because they represent most clearly Moore's connection with the Victorian novel, which is important to my study. The later versions of these novels are more streamlined and "modern" and lack the Victorian profusion of detail and multiplicity of plots of the earlier versions. For instance, Jeffares complains that *Muslin*, which omits both the political theme and the religious-sexual theme of *A Drama in Muslin*, lacks the latter's "warts and all picture of Ireland."[123]

Another source of frustration to the Moore scholar is Moore's patent lack of awareness of the relative merits of his own work. Gettmann complains that "In sum, it is impossible to deduce from Moore's prefaces a coherent, reasoned statement of the principles which guided his revisions . . . . ,"[124] and Hough states baldly that "He was incapable of what in any ordinary acceptation of the term would be called thought."[125] Certainly Moore's correspondence reveals that he believed each thing he wrote to be "the best thing he had ever done"; Fernando's observation that in speaking of *Evelyn Innes* "Moore seems to have alternated between fear that he might have produced a literary white elephant and elation that he had probably written a truly great imaginative novel"[126] is entirely typical. The only satisfactory solution to this confusion is the one posited by Seymour-Smith: "Moore himself lacked a satisfactory critical terminology, and his work needs to be examined not in terms of his own varying conceptions of it but in those of what it actually achieved."[127]

I shall approach Moore's three "realistic" novels with these considerations in mind. I shall attempt to judge each of these novels on its own merits and not merely as representative of particular "trends." As this will require a more open attitude than a narrowly formal study would permit, what I shall examine in these early works is Moore's novel technique in the wide sense, including thematic implications. In this way I hope to assess these three novels both for themselves and for what they illustrate about the English novel at one of the most exciting stages in its development. It is undoubtedly Moore's later style that Ernest Baker and W. C. Frierson are thinking of when they remark that Moore "stretch[ed] the capacities of fiction, and [made] more technical discoveries on his own account than . . . any other novelist of his time, except Henry James"[128] and that his "place in English literary history is that of an innovator,"[129] but I think that Moore's innovations began when he was still writing out of the tradition of the conventional Victorian novel. It is these innovations and this tradition that I wish to examine in *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters*.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Quoted in Joseph Hone, *The Life of George Moore* (London: Victor Gallancz, 1937), p. 373.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 80-144, pp. 327-33.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[4] Arthur Symons, "Impressions and Opinions," *Academy*, XXXIX (Mar. 21, 1891), 274.

[5] Compton MacKenzie, *Literature in My Time* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1933), p. 216.

[6] W. B. Yeats, "Thoughts on George Moore," *The Man of Wax*, ed. Douglas A. Hughes (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 42.

[7] Shane Leslie, *The End of a Chapter* (London: Constable, 1916), p. 185.

[8] Susan Dick, ed. *Confessions of a Young man*, by George Moore (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972).

[9] Lionel Stevenson, ed. *Esther Waters*, by George Moore (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).

[10] John Denny Fisher, "*Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* by George Moore: A Variorum Edition," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Illinois, 1963.

[11] John D. Cooke and Lionel Stevenson, *English Literature of the Victorian Period* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), p. 324.

[12] Martin Seymour-Smith, "Rediscovering George Moore," *Encounter* 1970, 58.

[13] Moore invited Morgan to be his biographer and named him as such in his will. When Moore died, Lady Cunard refused Morgan permission to use the letters Moore had written to her, whereupon Morgan abandoned the biography. See Charles Morgan, *Epitaph on George Moore* (London: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 2-4.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[15] Enid Starkie, *From Gautier to Eliot: The Influence of France on English Literature 1851-1939* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 73.

[16] Moore, *Confessions*, pp. 94-95.

[17] Quoted in Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 101.

[18] George Moore, "A Curious Book," *St. James's Gazette*, Sept. 2, 1884, 6.

[19] Moore, *Confessions*, pp. 165-66.

[20] Reprinted in George Moore, *Impressions and Opinions* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1913), p. 45.

[21] Malcolm Brown, *George Moore: A Reconsideration* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), p. 103.

[22] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 110. Arthur Symons was just as scathing as Moore in his remarks about Zola, and for the same reasons: "Zola . . . never finds just the right word, and it is his persistent fumbling for it which produces these miles of description; four pages describing how two people went upstairs, from the ground-floor to the sixth story, and then two pages afterwards to describe how they came downstairs again. . . . My main contention is that Zola's general use of words is . . . somewhat ineffectual. He tries to do what Flaubert did, without Flaubert's tools. . . ." Arthur Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1897), pp. 206-07.

[23] George Moore, "Preface," *Poor Folk*, by Fedor Dostoievsky, trans. Lena Milman (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894), p. xvi.

[24] Starkie, *From Gautier to Eliot*, p. 73.

[25] See Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

[26] Graham Hough, "George Moore and the Nineties," *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1960), p. 184.

[27] *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

[28] Geraint Goodwin reports that Moore said, "I left France to found the aesthetic novel in English" (*Conversations with George Moore* [London: Ernest Benn, 1929], p. 87), but, as Susan Dick points

out, "By 'aesthetic novel,' Moore meant a novel free from moral lessons and reflective of the true spirit of the age it grew out of" (*Confessions*, p. 6).

[29] Quoted in J.H., "George Moore: The Making of a Writer," *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 Feb., 1952, 149.

[30] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 260.

[31] Richard Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978), p. 119.

[32] Peter Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 90.

[33] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 255 n. 10.

[34] "For years it seemed to me impossible that women could love men. Women seemed to me so beautiful and desirable—men so ugly, almost revolting. Could they touch us without revulsion of feeling, could they really desire us? I was absorbed in the life of woman—the mystery of petticoats, so different from the staidness of trousers! the rolls of hair entwined with so much art, and suggesting so much colour and perfume, so different from the bare crop; the unnaturalness of the waist in stays! plentitude and slenderness of silk, so different from the stupidity of a black tail-coat; rose feet passing under the triple ruches of rose, so different from the broad foot of the male. My love for the life of women was a life within my life; and oh, how strangely secluded and veiled! A world of calm colour with phantoms moving, floating past and changing in dim light—an averted face with abundant hair, the gleam of a perfect bust or the poise of a neck turning slowly round, the gaze of deep translucid eyes. I loved women too much to give myself wholly to one." Moore, *Confessions*, p. 220.

[35] Susan Mitchell, *George Moore* (London: Maunsel, 1916), p. 46.

[36] Andrew Lang, "Realism and Romance," *Contemporary Review*, Nov. 1887, 688.

[37] William C. Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition 1885-1940* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), p. 65.

[38] A. Norman Jeffares, *George Moore* (London: F. Mildner & Sons, 1965), p. 17.

[39] John Freeman, *A Portrait of George Moore in a Study of his Work* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1922), p. 92.

[40] Peter Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 100.

[41] Charles Morgan, "George Moore: A Centenary Appreciation," *The Listener*, Feb. 28, 1952, 349.

[42] Émile Zola, *Le Roman Expérimental* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1923), p. 111.

[43] Ruth Zabriskie Temple, *The Critic's Alchemy* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1953), p. 232.

[44] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 49.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[46] W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 95.

[47] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[49] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 101.

[50] This is the assertion Zola makes to Moore as Moore reports it in *Impressions and Opinions*, p. 72. Huysmans records that Zola rebuked him for his defection from naturalism in a similar way: "Zola . . . went on repeating . . . the one phrase: 'I cannot allow that a man may change his ways of working and his view of art; I cannot allow that he may burn what he once adored'" ("Preface," *À Rebours* [New York: Illustrated Editions, 1931], p. 68).

[51] Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures*, p. viii.

[52] Jean C. Noël, *George Moore: l'homme et l'oeuvre (1852-1933)* Paris: Marcel Didier, 1966), p. 81.

[53] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* , p. 30.

[54] Quoted in Stephen Ullman, *Style in the French Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 2.

[55] See Goodwin, *Conversations with George Moore*, p. 132, and George Moore, *Pure Poetry: An Anthology* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1924), pp. 51-52.

[56] Goodwin, *Conversations with George Moore*, pp. 16-17.

[57] W. B. Yeats, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 383.

[58] See Milton Chaikin, "George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife* and Zola," *Revue de littérature comparée*, XXXI (Jan.-Mar. 1957), 85-88.

[59] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 90.

[60] See, for example, Mildred Adams, "The Apprenticeship of George Moore," Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1960; Milton Chaikin, "George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, ed. Graham Owens (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp. 21-44; A. J. Farmer, *Le Mouvement esthétique et "décadent" en Angleterre* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931); Walter Ferguson, *The Influence of Flaubert on George Moore* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934).

[61] Charles Burkhart, "George Moore and his Critics," *English Literature in Transition*, XX, 4 (1977), 200.

[62] W. C. Frierson, "George Moore Compromised with the Victorians," *The Man of Wax*, p. 75.

[63] Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 295.

[64] Burkhart, "George Moore and his Critics," 199.

[65] I have borrowed these terms from Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*.

[66] See Moore, *Confessions*, pp. 157-59.

[67] Starkie, *From Gautier to Eliot*, p. 80.

[68] Hough, "George Moore and the Nineties," *Image and Experience*, p. 196.

[69] Chaikin, "George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 24.

[70] For a detailed account of French realism see Levin, *The Gates of Horn*.

[71] See Edward Stone, ed., *What was Naturalism? Materials for an Answer* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959); Lyall H. Powers, *Henry James and the Naturalist Movement* (Michigan State University Press, 1971), Ch. I; and Levin, *The Gates of Horn*, Chs. I and II.

[72] Starkie, for example, says that "A novel by Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, published in 1868, marks the next important date in the history of the realist novel, for, with it, Naturalism begins in France" (*From Gautier to Eliot*, p. 66).

[73] See Roland Stromberg, *Romanticism, Naturalism, and Symbolism: Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848-1914* (New York: Walker, 1968), p. 69, and Powers, *Henry James and the Naturalist Movement*, p. 18.

[74] Gustave Flaubert, *Oeuvres Complètes, Correspondance* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1926-33), IV, 164-65, quoted in George J. Becker, ed., *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 94.

[75] *Ibid*. V, 253, quoted in Becker, p. 95.

[76] Martin Turnell, "Introduction," *Germinie*, by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. viii.

[77] Émile Zola, "Preface," *Thérèse Raquin*, trans. L. W. Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962), pp. 22-23. A similar attitude is expressed in the Goncourts' Preface to *Germinie Lacerteux*, which they refer to as "the clinic of love. . . . We asked ourselves whether what are called 'the lower orders' had no claim upon the Novel. . . . At the present time . . . when the Novel has undertaken the studies and duties of science, it is able to claim the liberties and immunities of the latter" (*Germinie Lacerteux*, trans. [London: W. W. Gibbings, 1892], pp. v-vii).

[78] Malcolm Elwin (*Old Gods Falling* [London: Collins Publishers, 1939], p. 62) and Lewis F. Haines ("Reade, Mill, and Zola: A Study of the Character and Intention of Charles Reade's Realistic Method," *Studies in Philology*, XL [Jan. 1943] 463-81) both suggest that Reade is the earliest English naturalistic novelist. However, as Frierson remarks, "Reade is much closer to Dickens than to Zola and the other documentors. . . . [He] possesses every vice . . . attributed to the Victorian novel. He is a slave to plot formulas depending upon coincidences and extraordinary happenings. . . . His tendency to sentimentalize and idealize the commonplace is . . . pronounced. . . ." (*The English Novel in Transition*, p. 10).

[79] Ferdinand Brunetière in 1881 claimed that "George Eliot raised the flag of naturalism in England a good twenty-five years ago" (*Le Roman naturaliste*, Paris, 1893, p. 222, quoted in Powers, *Henry James and the Naturalist Movement*, p. 13).

[80] Enid Starkie (*From Gautier to Eliot*, p. 68) cites James as the other "ambassador" (apart from Moore) of the naturalists in England, but, while James admired the naturalists' "seriousness and

honesty," he disliked "their ferocious pessimism and their handling of unclean things" (from a letter to William Dean Howells, quoted in Clarence R. Decker, *The Victorian Conscience* [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1952], p. 89).

[81] *English Literature in Transition*, XVII, 3 (1974), 201-22.

[82] Hough, "George Moore and the Nineties," *Image and Experience*, p. 184.

[83] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 85.

[84] Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), pp. 63-64.

[85] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 149.

[86] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 36.

[87] "It is the curious paradox of Victorianism that the great Victorians were strenuously anti-Victorian, and that the period they created, particularly in literature, was one of . . . vigorous protest—protest against materialism and complacency, against aesthetic and moral blindness" (Decker, *The Victorian Conscience*, p. 11). "The later novelists . . . were writing in some sense against their age; they were critical, even hostile, to its dominant assumptions" (Allen, *The English Novel*, p. 139).

[88] Lionel Stevenson, "The Rationale of Victorian Fiction," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XXVII (1973), 396-97.

[89] Anthony Trollope, "Novel Reading," *Nineteenth Century*, V (Jan. 1879), 32.

[90] Stevenson, "The Rationale of Victorian Fiction," 396.

[91] Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, *Naturalism* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 52.

[92] Stevenson, "The Rationale of Victorian Fiction," 396.

[93] J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 63.

[94] Allen, *The English Novel*, p. 298.

[95] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, pp. 85-86.

[96] Baudelaire sensed very early (in *Le Portefeuille*, 8 July, 1855) the salient differences in the English and the French notions of humour. He classifies the comic into the "absolute" (grotesque) and "ordinary" (significative) varieties, and explains that "In France, the land of lucid thought and demonstration, where the natural and direct aim of art is utility, we generally find the significative type. . . . But since at the root of our character there is an aversion for all extremes, and since one of the symptoms of every emotion, every science and every art in France is an avoidance of the excessive, the absolute and the profound, there is consequently but little of the savage variety to be found in this country. . . ." ("On the Essence of Laughter," *The Painter of Modern Life and other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne [London: Phaidon Press, 1964], pp. 158-59). The English variety of humour, on the other hand, is to Baudelaire grotesque: "To find true comic savagery . . . you have to cross the Channel and visit the foggy realms of spleen" (*Ibid.*, p. 159). He goes on to illustrate this point by describing the first English pantomime he saw, which seemed to him "violent": "The English Pierrot swept upon us like a hurricane, fell down like a sack of coals, and when he laughed his laughter made the auditorium quake; his laugh was like a joyful clap of thunder. . . . And everything else in this singular piece was expressed in the same way, with passionate gusto; it was the dizzy height of hyperbole" (*Ibid.*, pp. 160-61). This lack of subtlety that Baudelaire perceives in English humour, which has to do with laughter for its own sake as opposed to laughter for "utility," seems closely allied to the English love of idiosyncrasy for its own sake in the creation of character.

[97] Furst and Skrine, *Naturalism*, p. 33.

[98] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. xiii.

[99] Allen, *The English Novel*, p. 298.

[100] Levin, *The Gates of Horn*, p. 75.

[101] Alfred Tennyson, "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After."

[102] Emily Crawford, "Emile Zola," *Contemporary Review*, LV (Jan. 1889), 113. These and other vituperative "moral" attacks on naturalism by Victorian critics are well documented by Decker in *The Victorian Conscience*.

[103] Émile Zola, "De la moralite dans la littérature," *Oeuvres*, XXVI, 316, quoted in Powers, *Henry James and the Naturalist Movement*, p. 21.

[104] George Saintsbury, "The Present State of the Novel," II, *Fortnightly Review*, XLIX (Jan. 1888), 120-21.

[105] *Society*, April 21, 1888, quoted in The National Vigilance Association, "Pernicious Literature," *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 354.

[106] W. S. Lilly, "The New Naturalism," *Fortnightly Review*, XLIV (Aug. 1885), p. 241.

[107] Ferdinand Brunetière, "On the Essential Characteristic of French Literature," *Fortnightly Review*, July-Dec. 1892, 530, 532, 535-36.

[108] Emile Zola, "The Experimental Novel," *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, trans. Belle M. Sherman (New York: Haskell House, 1964), pp. 20-21, 25-26.

[109] Brunetière, "On the Essential Characteric of French Literature," 537.

[110] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 130.

[111] Lionel Stevenson, "George Moore: Romantic, Naturalist, Aesthete," *Études Anglaises*, XXI, 4 (Sept. 1968), 364. This is apparent in Moore's letters to Dujardin, in which he constantly worries about his French. See John Eglinton, ed., *Letters from George Moore to Ed. Dujardin 1886-1922* (New York: Crosby Gaige, 1929).

[112] Moore, *Confessions*, pp. 157-59.

[113] *Ibid.*, pp. 172-73.

[114] Graham Hough, "Introduction," *Esther Waters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. v.

[115] Martin Seymour-Smith, "Rediscovering George Moore," *Encounter*, XXXV, 6 (Dec. 1970), 66.

[116] Burkhart, "George Moore and his Critics," 202.

[117] Lloyd Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), p. 87.

[118] Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1978), p. 3.

[119] James Joyce, "The Day of the Rabblement," *Two Essays* (Minneapolis: McCosh's Book Store, 1957—reprint of 1901 edition), p. 17.

[120] Seymour-Smith, "Rediscovering George Moore," 60.

[121] Royal A. Gettmann, "George Moore's Revisions of *The Lake, The Wild Goose*, and *Esther Waters*," *PMLA*,LIX (June 1944), 541.

[122] Jay Jernigan, "George Moore's 'Re-Tying of Bows': A Critical Study of the Eight Early Novels and Their Revisions," Ph.D. Thesis, Kansas State University, 1966.

[123] A. Norman Jeffares, "*A Drama in Muslin*," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 19.

[124] Gettman, "George Moore's Revisions," 544.

[125] Hough, "George Moore and the Nineties," *Image and Experience*, p. 186.

[126] Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel*, p. 102.

[127] Seymour-Smith, "Rediscovering George Moore," 58.

[128] Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel: The Day Before Yesterday* (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1938), p. 201.

[129] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 84.

5

CHAPTER II

A MUMMER'S WIFE

> I invented adultery, which didn't exist in the English novel till I began writing. . . .
>
> George Moore in a recorded conversation in the unpublished notes of Mr. Barrett H. Clark[1]

1. Background

When *A Mummer's Wife* appeared in 1885, any critical acclaim it received was largely in the form of backhanded compliments. The *Athenaeum* somewhat acidly remarked that "It is on the whole remarkably free from the element of uncleanness,"[2] the *Saturday Review* commented that "In *A Mummer's Wife* [Moore] attempts to be as offensive as the master [Zola] himself. . . . But . . . Mr. Moore is only curious and disgusting"[3] and Bernard Shaw, when told that Moore had written a wonderful new naturalistic novel, is reported to have said, "Nonsense! But I *know* George Moore. He couldn't possibly write a real book."[4]

Moore's second novel remains largely unnoticed and unappreciated. Most readers who are familiar with it will probably have heard of it in connection with the demise of the Victorian three-volume novel, a literary event of some importance in the late nineteenth century.[5] Moore's part in the debate over the censorship of the lending libraries is outlined by W. C. Frierson, Clarence Decker and Joseph Hone, among others. Briefly, after Smith's and Mudie's banned *A Modern Lover*, Moore persuaded Henry Vizetelly to publish *A Mummer's Wife* in a cheap one-volume edition and to make it available to the public at an affordable price (ten shillings). Other novelists and publishers followed suit, breaking Smith's and Mudie's monopoly. The controversy centred on the "French" (sexually explicit) nature of the novel; Moore replied to this charge in his vituperative pamphlet *Literature at Nurse, Or Circulating Morals*, in which he scathingly attacked the emasculatory function of the libraries:

> Instead of being allowed to fight, with and amid, the thoughts and aspirations of men, literature is now rocked to an ignoble rest in the motherly arms of the librarian. That of which he approves is fed with gold; that from which he turns the breast dies like a vagrant's child; while in and out of his voluminous skirts run a motley and monstrous progeny, a callow, a whining, a puking brood of bastard bantlings, a race of Aztecs that disgrace the intelligence of the English nation. Into this nursery none can enter except in baby clothes; and the task of discriminating between a divided skirt and a pair of trousers is performed by the librarian. Deftly his fingers lift skirt and under-skirt, and if the examination prove satisfactory the sometimes decently attired dolls are packed in tin-cornered boxes, and scattered through every drawing-room in the kingdom, to be in rocking-chairs fingered and fondled by the "young person" until she longs for some newer fashion in literary frills and furbelows. Mudie is the law we labour after: the suffrage of young women we are supposed to gain: the paradise of the English novelist is in the school-room: he is read there or nowhere. And yet it is certain that never in any age or country have writers been asked to write under such restricted conditions; if the same test by which modern writers are judged were applied to their forefathers, three-fourths of the contents of our libraries would have to be condemned as immoral publications. . . . Let us renounce the effort to reconcile these two irreconcilable things—art and young girls.[6]

By this time other novelists as well were echoing Thackeray's complaint that "Since the author of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper. Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art."[7] Even Henry James protested in 1880 that "Half of life is a sealed book to young unmarried ladies, and how can a novel be worth anything that deals with only half of life? . . . Our English system is a good thing for virgins and boys, and a bad thing for the novel itself. . . ."[8]

A Mummer's Wife was important for more than the part it played in this controversy, however. In his Foreword to the 1966 Liveright edition of the novel, Walter Miller asserts that "Just as 1492 connotes the opening of the New World, so 1885 signifies the beginning of modern English literature. One of the main reasons is that *A Mummer's Wife* was published in that year. With this experimental novel, George Moore introduced French naturalist techniques into English fiction, dealt a telling blow to Victorian aesthetics, got up momentum for other experiments that helped shape today's art, and secured for himself a permanent place among our leading novelists."[9] While these claims for the novel's importance may be slightly extravagant (it was *Esther Waters*, if any novel, which secured Moore his "place" among English novelists), other critics have agreed that in some sense *A Mummer's Wife* is the first, and possibly the only, naturalistic novel ever written in English.[10]

Certainly in 1885, despite his enthusiastic review of the symbolist *À Rebours* in 1884, Moore was still an avowed disciple of Zola, to whom he had been introduced by Manet at a *L'Assommoir* ball (to which Moore went dressed as Coupeau) in 1890. His laudatory preface to the English edition of *Pot-Bouille* appeared in the same year as *A Mummer's Wife*, and when he was writing his own novel, according to Hone, he wrote to Zola with high expectations: "If I succeed, as I expect, in digging a dagger into the heart of the sentimental school, I shall have hopes of bringing about a change in the literature of my country—of being in fact Zola's offshoot in England (*d'être enfin un ricocher de Zola en Angleterre*)."[11] Moore did not quite succeed in these ambitious aims, or at least not immediately—as I pointed out in Chapter I, not even the considerably modified "English" version of naturalism became popular in England until the 1890's,—but he certainly helped to lay the groundwork for new freedom of expression in the English novel.

The question of influence is particularly instructive in regard to *A Mummer's Wife*. Contemporary as well as modern critics have tended to see it as a "French" rather than an "English" novel; Henry James said that it seemed to be "thought in French and inadequately translated,"[12] and Stuart Sherman called it "a kind of English 'transposition' of *Madame Bovary*, flavored with a handful of something of Zola's."[13] Milton Chaikin (who reduces it to "very many bits culled from . . . Zola's novels") calls *A Mummer's Wife* "a book written according to a formula,"[14] and Douglas Hughes likewise sees Moore "loosely following Zola's fictional formula"[15] in his second novel. Perhaps most tellingly, Zola himself seems to provide indisputable evidence that Moore followed the naturalistic formula in the composition of *A Mummer's Wife*. In "Du roman" he outlines the following case:

> Suppose that one of our naturalistic novelists wishes to write a novel on theatrical life. He sets out with this general idea, without having as yet a single fact or a single character. His first care is to gather together in his notes all that he knows of this world which he wishes to depict. He has known such and such

> an actor, he has witnessed such and such a play. Here are data already, the best, for they have ripened within himself. Then he will set about the business, he will get the men who are the best informed on the subject talking, he will collect their expressions, their stories, and their portraits. That is not all; he then turns to written documents, reading up all that he thinks will be of the slightest service to him. Finally he visits the places, lives a few days in the theatre.[16]

As Jean C. Noël points out, "Ne dirait-on pas que c'est lui [Moore] que Zola avait décrit"[17] in this passage.

This account parallels almost exactly Moore's description in *A Communication to My Friends* of his research for *A Mummer's Wife*. After Vizetelly advised him to document an ugly town, "the uglier the better," for the setting of his next novel, Moore set out to gather information. He chose Hanley (later adopted by Arnold Bennett as the setting for his novels of the Five Towns), in addition to a theatrical milieu. Notebook in hand, in true Zolaesque fashion, Moore went touring with the second company of *Les Cloches de Corneville*, visiting Hanley as well as other factory towns.

The naturalism of *A Mummer's Wife*—undoubtedly its most interesting and significant quality—will figure largely in my analysis of the novel in the following chapter. I shall argue that *A Mummer's Wife* is no mere French copy; that Moore modified the naturalistic formula in this novel in ways that are more subtle and complex than has generally been supposed; and that he wrote an amazingly strong novel in the process, a novel which even more than *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* has been overlooked by literary historians. In fact, Moore's modifications of the naturalistic formula constituted improvements on it, resulting in a kind of enhanced realism. Miller speaks of Moore "surpass[ing] the requirements of naturalism, without in any way violating them,"[18] and William Newton asserts that "it is quite possible to find in his novels up through *Esther Waters* almost every trait of naturalism, frequently in purer form than in the pages of the master [Zola] himself."[19] I shall attempt to show in what sense these assertions are true of *A Mummer's Wife*, and how in this supposed "copy" of French naturalistic novels Moore added something immensely vital to the English novel of the time.

The two novels generally acknowledged as the French sources for *A Mummer's Wife* provide a good starting point for my study. Douglas Hughes speaks confidently of "its obvious debt to Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*,"[20] and I shall deal with the latter influence first, as it is the more significant. In an article entitled "Flaubert, Miss Braddon, and George Moore," C. Heywood in 1960 argued that Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) was not only "the earliest borrowing from Flaubert in English literature" but also "a major source of *A Mummer's Wife*."[21] "Though Moore was . . . familiar with Flaubert's novel by this date," says Heywood, "several aspects of his own novel which have till now been taken as borrowings from Flaubert derive in fact from Miss Braddon."[22] This article is extremely interesting, not because of the accuracy of Heywood's claims, but because it points to a novel which is in fact what Sherman accused *A Mummer's Wife* of being: an English "transposition" of *Madame Bovary*. As such, *The Doctor's Wife* provides an excellent point of reference for a study of the naturalism of *A Mummer's Wife*; if Isabel Sleaford (Miss Braddon's heroine) is an English Emma Bovary, what is Kate Ede? The distance between Flaubert's novel and Miss Braddon's is a convenient gauge for measuring the extent to which *A Mummer's Wife* achieves a complex transference of the principles of one conception of the novel into the traditions of another.

To begin with, it is certain that Moore read *The Doctor's Wife*, to which he refers in *Avowals* as "a derivative *Madame Bovary*."[23] In addition, as Heywood points out, Kate's favourite novel, the "one story that . . . caused her deeper emotions than perhaps even the others had done"[24] bears a much closer resemblance to *The Doctor's Wife* than to Flaubert's novel:

> It concerned a beautiful young woman with a lovely oval face, who was married to a very tiresome country doctor. This lady was in the habit of reading Byron and Shelley in a rich, sweet-scented meadow, down by the river which flowed dreamily through smiling pasture-lands adorned by spreading trees. But this meadow belonged to a young squire, a superb man with grand, broad shoulders, who day after day used to watch these readings by the river, without, however, venturing to address a word to the fair trespasser. One day, however, he was startled by a shriek; in her poetical dreamings the lady had slipped into the water. A moment sufficed to tear off his coat, and as he swam like a water-dog, he had no difficulty in rescuing her. After this adventure he had, of course, to call and inquire, and from henceforth his visits grew more and more frequent, and by a strange coincidence, he used generally to come riding up to the hall-door when the husband was away curing the ills of the country folk. Hours never to be forgotten were passed under the trees by the river, he pleading his cause, and she refusing to leave poor Arthur—he was too

> good a fellow. Heart-broken, at last the squire gave up the pursuit, and went to foreign parts, where he waited thirty years until he heard Arthur was dead. Then he came back with a light heart to his first and only love, who had never ceased to think of him, and lived with her happily forever afterwards. (38-39)

This—more or less—outlines the plot of *The Doctor's Wife*, with the exception of Moore's fanciful additions of the lady's fall into the water and the happily-ever-after ending.

The plot of the real *Doctor's Wife*, however, is just as melodramatic as Moore's version. It begins, like *Madame Bovary*, with a rather foolish young heroine who satisfies her vague romantic yearnings by reading novels. Like Emma, Isabel Sleaford marries a kind but dull young country doctor, with whom she is increasingly bored and dissatisfied. Also like Emma, Isabel is attracted to someone outside the marriage (the young neighbouring squire returned from abroad, Roland Lansdell)—but there the similarity ends. As soon as Roland proposes to Isabel that they run away together, the novel turns into a conventional and predictable Victorian melodrama: Isabel renounces him and resolves to be "good"; he pines miserably for her; her blackguard father haunts the neighbourhood asking for money and threatening to kill Roland, who once testified against him; Isabel's husband catches a fever from his country patients, Roland is fatally assaulted by Isabel's father, and both men die nobly within a few days of each other; and Isabel is left in the end sadder but wiser, and doing good works for the poor with Roland's fortune, which he bequeaths to her on his deathbed.

From Flaubert's initial situation, then, Miss Braddon deviates widely, in ways that are characteristically Victorian. Her heroine is "not a wicked woman; she was only very foolish."[25] More specifically, Isabel's romantic inclinations lead her away from, rather than towards, a sexual liaison; the biggest disappointment in her life is the shattering of her ideals when Roland asks her to elope. She says,

> "I never thought that you would ask me to be more to you than I am now: I never thought that it was wicked to come here and meet you. I have read of people, who by some fatality could never marry, loving each other, and being true to others for years and years—till death, sometimes; and I fancied that you loved me like that; and the thought of your love made me so happy; and it was such happiness to see you sometimes, and to think of you afterwards, remembering every word you had said, and seeing your face as plainly as I see it now. I thought, till yesterday, that this might go on for ever, and never, never believed that you would think me like those wicked women who run away from their husbands." (II, 98)

After this bitter lesson, "Isabel Gilbert was a woman all at once" (II, 104) and develops in maturity and understanding from this point until the end of the novel.

In essence, *The Doctor's Wife* is a tract against the evils of excessive romanticism. The narrator, omniscient and very much in evidence, points out that Isabel in reading so many novels lived "as much alone as if she had resided in a balloon, for ever suspended in mid air, and never coming down in serious earnest to the common joys and sorrows of the vulgar life about her" (I, 38). As I pointed out in Chapter I, such personal moral lessons, derived from the experience of the main character and enunciated by an omniscient narrator, were a salient characteristic of the Victorian novel.

In addition, the narrator in *A Doctor's Wife* has a wide moral sympathy for her characters. Isabel's conduct is excused because "She only wanted the vague poetry of life, the mystic beauty of romance infused somehow into her existence; and she was as yet too young to understand that latent element of poetry which underlies the commonest life" (II, 227). Even Roland, who initially appears to be a villain, is categorized by the narrator as "a benevolently-disposed young man, desirous of doing as little mischief in the world as might be compatible with his being tolerably happy himself; and fully believing that no great or irreparable harm need result from his appropriation of another man's wife" (II, 105).

Finally, *A Doctor's Wife* has none of the pessimism of *Madame Bovary*. Indeed, part of the novel's point about novel-reading is made through the narrator "poking fun" at Isabel in an exceedingly good-humoured way. Early in the novel we are told that

> She wanted her life to be like her books; she wanted to be a heroine,—unhappy perhaps, and dying early. She had an especial desire to die early, by consumption, with a hectic flush and unnatural lustre in her eyes. She fancied every time she had a little cough that the consumption was coming, and she began to pose herself, and was gently melancholy to her half-brothers, and told them one by one, in confidence, that she did not think she should be with them long. They were slow to understand the drift of her remarks, and would ask her if she was going out as a governess; and, if she took the trouble to explain her dismal meaning, were apt to destroy the sentiment of the situation by saying, "Oh, come now, Hookee Walker... Who eat a plum-dumpling yesterday for dinner, and asked for more? That's the only sort of consumption *you*'ve got, Izzie; two helps of pudding at dinner, and no end of bread-and-butter for breakfast." (I, 36-37)

This sounds more like Dickens than Flaubert, and it is obvious that *The Doctor's Wife* has undergone so many Victorian transformations that it bears very little resemblance at all to its predecessor.

It is particularly fortunate for the purposes of my study that the novel Miss Braddon chose to "Anglicize" in this way was the novel in which the very roots of naturalism had their being. In Flaubert's letters may be found all of the key principles of naturalism—the impersonality of the author, the adoption of the methods of the natural sciences, the absence of "morality," the depiction of unexceptional characters—and in *Madame Bovary* is the prototype for two other novels which are acknowledged to be the first naturalistic novels: the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) and Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867). Matthew Josephson says of *Germinie* that "The whole thesis of Bovary was here, dominant, as it was forever afterward in the realistic masterpieces: *a given personality, conceived as a unit in a mass, pitted against its environment, the milieu into which it is born.*"[26] Zola reviewed this "clinic of Love"[27] with enthusiasm, pointing out in particular its air of scientific experiment and its freedom from moral constraints in expressing "reality" so frankly. Zola was undoubtedly influenced by both *Madame Bovary* and *Germinie Lacerteux*; as Auerbach points out, he "is twenty years younger than the generation of Flaubert and the Goncourts. There are connections between him and them; he is influenced by them; he stands on their shoulders. . . ."[28] *Thérèse Raquin*, as I pointed out in Chapter I, is also a "clinic of Love" and the official beginning of naturalism.

These three novels—*Madame Bovary*, *Germinie Lacerteux*, and *Thérèse Raquin*—will form the matrix of naturalist characteristics at the opposite end of the scale from *The Doctor's Wife*, and it is against this scale that I will set Moore's *A Mummer's Wife*.

2. Early Objections

I shall begin my discussion with an examination of the issue of sex, which marks the widest division between *The Doctor's Wife* and its French counterparts (and, indeed, between the naturalist and Victorian conceptions of the novel), and which constituted one of the main reasons for the banning of *A Mummer's Wife* by Smith's and Mudie's. Of Moore's boast that he had "invented adultery" in the English novel, Granville Hicks remarks that "He was not . . . far wrong. Gissing's women . . . are incapable of passion. Moore, whether or not he had the profound insight into feminine psychology of which he boasted, at least was courageous enough to record certain elementary observations. There is not only adultery in *A Modern Lover*; there is sufficient passion to make the adultery plausible."[29] I would like to qualify Hicks's (and Moore's) views slightly by adding that although Moore may have in some sense "invented adultery," it was only in the Victorian novel (the English novel in the eighteenth century contained plenty of adultery) and that this "invention" occurred in *A Mummer's Wife* rather than in *A Modern Lover*. There is passion in the latter novel, as Hicks suggests, but only on the part of the women, the minor characters; Lewis Seymour, the hero, remains cheerfully self-indulgent rather than passionate.

Kate Ede, the Hanley dressmaker who is the heroine of *A Mummer's Wife*, is at the beginning of Moore's novel in precisely the same situation as Isabel Sleaford, Emma Bovary, and Thérèse Raquin. She is married to an unattractive husband, the asthmatic Ralph, and dominated by her religious mother-in-law. She is romantically inclined, and becomes attracted to her boarder Dick Lennox, the manager of Morton and Cox's Theatrical Company. At this point, however, the turn of events in *A Mummer's Wife* differs widely—and significantly—from those in Braddon's novel as well as from those in the French naturalistic novels.

Isabel, as I have pointed out, renounces her "lover," having learned her lesson. It is noteworthy (and slightly implausible) that there is absolutely no sexuality at all in *The Doctor's Wife*. Although Isabel is excessively romantic, and deeply in love with Roland, her fantasies all have to do with goodness, in the form of heroic renunciations, noble deaths and unrequited love. In fact, she is a "pure" Victorian heroine who, when confronted with the option of leaving her husband for her lover, is properly aghast ("Not for one moment did the Doctor's Wife contemplate the possibility of taking the step which Roland Lansdell had proposed to her. . . . The possibility of deliberately leaving her husband to follow the footsteps of this other man, was as far beyond her power of comprehension as the possibility that she might steal a handful of arsenic out of one of the earthenware jars in the surgery and mix it with the sugar that sweetened George Gilbert's matutinal coffee" [II, 102—03]). This, complete with the allusion to the handful of arsenic, is obviously what Miss Braddon feels to be a necessary corrective to *Madame Bovary*. In any case, there is no question of adultery in *The Doctor's Wife*; Isabel is simply too pure to sully her hands or even her mind with such notions.

All three French novels, on the other hand, contain an abundance of adultery. Emma takes two lovers, first Rodolphe and then Léon, and Thérèse takes Laurent. What is noteworthy is that in all three heroines sex is a passion amounting to an illness or obsession, an animal need unadorned by "love" except in an inflamed, unhealthy sense. All three degrade themselves sexually: Germinie has a secret life of excesses with strangers, Thérèse is talked into murdering her husband, and Emma, as Henry James points out, "remains absorbed in romantic intention and vision while fairly rolling in the dust."[30]

Between these extremes of the complete absence of sexual desire and sexual desire bordering on mania, is Moore's Kate Ede. Her romanticism, evident from the very first scene of the novel in which she sees Ralph's suffering as "noble," is described in the following way:

> She accepted Ralph as unsuspectingly as she had before accepted the tawdry poetry of her favourite fiction. Her nature not being a passionate one, she was able to do this without any apparent transition of sentiment. . . . She accepted her husband's kisses as she did the toil he imposed on her—meekly, unaffectedly, as a matter of course. Apparently she had known all through that the romances which used so strongly to fascinate her were merely idle dreams, having no bearing upon the daily life of human beings—things fit to amuse a young girl's fancies, and to be thrown aside when the real cares of life were entered upon. (40)

Kate's nature is "not a passionate one," unlike either Isabel's or Emma's; Moore avoids both the extreme idealism of the former and the extreme sensualism of the latter. Also, Kate does not have either Isabel's condescension or Emma's active dislike for her husband. In fact, we are told that

> Had he been a little kinder he would have satisfied her. Her dreams did not fly high, and now as she sat by him, holding his clammy hand, she thought she would have felt happy were she sure of even so much affection. A little love would have made her life so much pleasanter. It did not matter who gave it; she sighed for a little, ever so little. (20)

As Richard Cave remarks, "Unlike Emma Bovary, Kate seeks no Byronic tempests of the emotions but only tenderness, comfort and security."[31] It is mainly Dick's kindness and humanity, for instance, which draw Kate to him:

> The man was coarse, large, sensual, even as is a mutton chop. But each movement of his fat hands was protective, every word he uttered was kind, the very intonation of his voice was comforting. He was in a word, human, and this attracted all that was human in you. The intelligence counted for nothing; his charm lay in his humanity. (67)

This is not to say that there is no sexual attraction between Kate and Dick, however. When she takes his breakfast to him, we are told that "Kate could not choose but like him, and it made her wish all the more that he would cover up his big, bare neck. . . . There was something very human in this big man, and Kate did not know whether his animalism irritated or pleased her" (42-43). Dick's "big, bare neck" and his healthy "animalism" are obviously attractive to Kate, especially in contrast with Ralph who, even when he is well, is seen "picking . . . a bad tooth with a hairpin taken from the drawers" (80).

The love-episode between Kate and Dick that was objected to most strongly by the libraries seems relatively innocuous by modern standards. Kate has gone downstairs to open the door for Dick, who is still her boarder at this point. After a short conversation, the following occurs:

> They could not see each other. After a long silence she said, "We must not stop talking here. Mrs. Ede sleeps, you know, in the room at the back of the work-room, and she might hear us."
>
> "Then come into the sitting-room," said Dick, taking her hands and drawing her towards him.
>
> "Oh, I cannot!"
>
> "I love you better than anyone in world."
>
> "No, no; why should you love me?"
>
> Although she could not see his face, she felt his breath on her neck. Strong arms were wound about her, she was carried forward, and the door was shut behind her.
>
> Only the faintest gleam of starlight touched the wall next to the window; the darkness slept profoundly on the landing and staircase; and when the silence was again broken, a voice was heard saying, "Oh, you shouldn't have done this! What shall I tell my husband if he asks me where I've been?"
>
> "Say you have been talking to me about my bill, dear. I'll see you in the morning."[32]

This is definitely adultery; however muted and suppressed, there is no doubt that a sexual encounter between a married woman and a man who is not her husband is going on behind the closed door. However tame and conventional it may seem in comparison to the lingering image of the coach crazily whirling with the insatiable Emma and Léon inside, the fact remains that the doctor's wife would never have considered any such thing, even for a moment.

Kate and Dick have passion, then, but not very much. Without this scene their lovemaking consists of a couple of stolen kisses and the following curious description, which occurs just after they have eloped:

> The morning hours were especially delightful. Immediately on getting out of bed she went into the sitting-room to see after Dick's breakfast. It was laid out on a round table, the one white tint in the rose twilight of the half-drawn blinds. Masses of Virginia creeper, now weary of the summer and ready to fall with the first October winds, grew into the room, and the two armchairs drawn up by the quietly burning fire seemed, like all the rest, to inspire indolence. Kate lingered settling and dusting little rickety ornaments, tempted at once by the freshness of her dressing-gown and the soothing warmth of the room. It penetrated her with sensations of happiness too acute to be durable, and as they mounted to her head in a sort of effervescent reverie, she would walk forwards to the folding doors to talk to Dick of —it did not matter what—it was for the mere sound of his voice that she came; and, in default of anything better to say, she would upbraid him for his laziness. The room, full of the intimacy of their life, enchanted her, and half in shame, half in delight, she would affect to arrange the pillows while he buttoned his collar. When this was accomplished she led him triumphantly to the breakfast table, and with one arm resting on his knees, watched the white shapes of the eggs seen through the bubbling water. (158)

The thing that is "curious" about this scene is that its atmosphere is domestic rather than erotic. The quietly burning fire, the freshness of Kate's dressing gown, the sweet delight of the lovers, the homeliness of the boiling eggs, all create the ambiance of a typical "young newlyweds" scene in a Victorian novel. In fact, even though Kate and Dick have only recently run away together, they seem "married." This is an important point for two reasons. First of all, the narrator through such scenes appears to condone the elopement, a highly unusual attitude in the Victorian novel at this time. The first of the "New Woman" novels which sanctioned love outside of marriage were not written until the eighteen-nineties, and *Jude the Obscure* was not published until ten years after the publication of *A Mummer's Wife*. In this respect, at least, Moore succeeded in "digging a dagger into the heart of the sentimental school," and it is in this tacit approval (or lack of disapproval) of Kate's elopement that he can really be said, I think, to have "invented adultery" in the English novel of the time.

The other reason that Kate's and Dick's instant domesticity is interesting is because, given the conventions of the Victorian novel, this was the only way in which Moore *could* indicate the narrator's approval of their liaison. Any other approach (such as the frank portrayal of their sexual enjoyment of each other) would have been regarded as outright pornography. Ian Watt's observation about the nature of courtly love in French and English fiction is extremely pertinent at this juncture:

> Gradually, however, the code of romantic love began to accommodate itself to religious, social, and psychological reality, notably to marriage and the family. This process seems to have occurred particularly early in England, and the new ideology which eventually came into being there does much to explain both the rise of the novel and the distinctive difference between the English and French traditions in fiction. Denis de Rougemont, in his study of the development of romantic love, writes of the French

> novel that "to judge by its literature, adultery would seem to be one of the most characteristic occupations of Western man." Not so in England, where the break with the originally adulterous character of courtly love was so complete that George Moore was almost justified in claiming to have "invented adultery, which didn't exist in the English novel till I began writing."[33]

Moore was "almost" justified indeed; the fact that Kate and Dick are actually married shortly after the scene I have described further ensures that the amount of "adultery" in the novel is kept to a minimum.

In playing down Kate's passion and yet allowing her to run away with her lover, Moore creates a scenario that is considerably less sensational (and more realistic) than either Miss Braddon's or Flaubert's. Kate herself is similarly pedestrian, as I have noted. Flaubert himself called Emma a "naturally corrupt woman,"[34] and Isabel is a sort of purified Emma—purified, however, beyond the point of credibility. Kate is neither excessively good nor excessively bad, but merely weak, as the narrator tell us:

> She was not strong nor great, nor was she conscious of any deep feeling that if she acted otherwise than she did she would be living an unworthy life. She was merely good because she was a kind-hearted woman, without bad impulses, and admirably suited to the life she was leading. (38)

And, just as Kate's nature does not run to extremes, neither do the characters of the men she is involved with. Isabel's husband and lover are both finally portrayed as heroes, as I have noted, while the male characters in the French novels are an extraordinary group:

Emma's husband is a clown, Thérèse's is a sickly, despicable weakling, and Germinie's fiancé will not even marry her; and the lovers of all three women are brutal cads. "Extraordinary" is not a word that could be applied either to Kate's husband or to her lover. Ralph is harmless, if he is not entirely likeable, and Dick is kind and jolly but certainly neither a hero nor a villain. Their ordinariness, in fact, makes Moore's characters seem closer to the everyday norm of "real life" than either the French or the English versions, and in this instance Moore's "slice of life" seems more authentic than that served up by Zola himself.

Apart from its alleged sexual explicitness, the other reason *A Mummer's Wife* was banned by the libraries was because of its "foulness": "It is, we know," said the critic for the *Saturday Review*, "a foolish thing to wash one's foul linen in public. How much more foolish it is to spread out and sort one's foul linen in public, not to wash it, but merely to demonstrate how foul it is."[35] The details surrounding Kate's alcoholism, in particular, are highly unpleasant. Moore's source for this part of the novel (the final third) is said to be Zola's *L'Assommoir*, but I think that the drunkenness in that novel is rather more incidental than in *A Mummer's Wife*. Gervaise and Coupeau are victims primarily of indolence, ignorance and poverty, whereas Kate is a true alcoholic, obsessed, finally, with her need for drink. As Lilian Furst points out, "Both [Kate and Gervaise] indeed die of alcoholism—but surely such thematic parallelism cannot be accepted as proof of influence."[36] (The same point, I would argue, could be made as to the influence of *Nana* on the theatrical milieu in *A Mummer's Wife*.)

After Kate runs away with Dick, she becomes a successful actress and a happily married woman. "As the days passed," we are told,

> Kate grew happier, until she began to think she must be the happiest woman living. Her life had now an occupation, and no hour that went pressed upon her heavier than would a butterfly's wing. The mornings had always been delightful; Dick was with her then, and the afternoons had been taken up with her musical studies. It was the long evenings she used to dread; now they had become part and parcel of her daily pleasures. They dined about four, and when dinner was over it was time to talk about what kind of house they were going to have, to fidget about in search of brushes and combs, the curling-tongs, and to consider what little necessaries she had better bring down to the theatre with her. (182)

At this point, no further comparison with either *The Doctor's Wife* or the naturalist "clinical studies of love" seems possible. A simple plot-reversal has seemingly occurred: the adultery between the ordinary seamstress and the jolly mummer, never very tempestuous to start with, settles into a comfortable enough routine. Neither the melodramatic renunciations of *The Doctor's Wife* nor the ruined lives of the three French novels have come to pass, and the remainder of the novel is devoted to the progress of Kate's alcoholism. Lloyd Fernando finds this development disconcerting, and Moore's novel disunified as a result:

> A claim on behalf of Moore's originality does not . . . overcome successfully this use of a second major source for a single novel. Moore presents Kate's alcoholism with entire conviction, yet the book does not recover

> from the resulting shift of emphasis. The woman who has fled to freedom degenerates not really on account of her moral incapacity, but on account of a factor introduced mostly as an "experiment" in the Zola manner, and given patently separate thematic treatment late in the novel.[37]

I would disagree. Kate does degenerate "on account of her moral capacity," in some sense, at least, and Moore's "'experiment' in the Zola manner" in the final third of the novel is a convincing and natural outcome of the situation he establishes in the first two-thirds. Osbert Burdett claims that "the cause of Kate's drinking is too vague,"[38] but it is difficult to see how this is so. Quite simply, she begins to drink because she is ashamed of being a "loose woman" sexually ("loose," that is, according to the tenets of the religion in which she was raised), and she continues to drink because she becomes unreasonably jealous of Dick. Just as much as *Madame Bovary*, *Germinie Lacerteux* or *Thérèse Raquin*, *A Mummer's Wife* is "a clinical study of love"; but instead of the main character being destroyed directly as a result of her sexual desires, she is destroyed indirectly (but just as effectively) by them as they are replaced, distorted and transformed into a desire for alcohol. Although Kate does not have Isabel's passion for purity, neither does she have the amoral, animalistic attitude toward sex which characterizes Emma, Germinie and Thérèse (as well as Nana and Gervaise). Once again, this enhances the realism of Moore's tale; as Peter Ure points out, in choosing sexual mores as Kate's stumbling block, Moore "showed some insight into the pathology of conscience."[39] He also showed some insight into middle-class

Victorian moral priorities, it might be added; it is unlikely that a woman of Kate's class in her position would be able to accept her own adultery without qualms. She does not "roll in the dust" like Emma, have a secret shameful life like Germinie or commit murder like Thérèse, but she feels guilty all the same, and unable to accept her success with equanimity. Kate's use of religion as a vehicle for her romanticism is likewise psychologically astute. This phenomenon, which Moore expands upon in the character of Cecilia in *A Drama in Muslin*, also occurs in *Germinie Lacerteux* ("Dans le prêtre qui l'écoute et dont la voix lui arrive doucement, la femme de travail et de peine voit moins le ministre de Dieu . . . que le confident de ses chagrins et l'ami de ses misères")[40] and in *The Doctor's Wife* ("[Isabel] wanted to find some shrine, some divinity, who would accept her worship. . . . If not Roland Lansdell, why then Christianity" [118-19]).

Moore's experiment in *A Mummer's Wife* is therefore more subtle and complex, both psychologically and artistically, than Flaubert's, the Goncourts' or Zola's. In my opinion, this third phase of Kate's existence springs convincingly from the first two, as I have said; and furthermore, it is dovetailed beautifully with the rest of the novel to create an aesthetically satisfying whole.

The stages of Kate's addiction are depicted by slow degrees. Significantly, she gets drunk the first time because she is appalled at having received a diamond ring from a member of the theatre audience. The other actresses in the dressing-room, who see nothing wrong in Kate keeping the ring, celebrate it by buying a bottle of whiskey, and

> For a moment a sense of shame, bitter and blinding as a wild salt wind, overwhelmed her, and she could not repress a positive loathing of herself. Since he had left Hanley it was the strongest shock her moral nature had received. Vainly she searched for an excuse, but could find none. It was not until she had drunk a couple of whiskys that she began to forget and find courage to laugh at Dolly's dirty stories. (185)

The following sensation of drunkenness is described from Kate's point of view:

> When she got on the stage, with the fumes of the gas, a vague sickness mounted to her head. Montgomery's arms, as he beat time in the orchestra, seemed to her of immeasurable length, and the auditorium reeled, a confused mixture of lights and black spots. The music sounded in her ears like some harsh cruelty, and at times the voices of those singing round her became as unmerciful as the howling of demons mocking her out of the depths of some meaningless nightmare. Each clash of the cymbals seemed more pitiless than the last, and she had at last to stagger into the wings and ask for a glass of water. (185-86)

This description is metaphorical rather than literal, and the metaphors themselves are not particularly sordid or distasteful; but at least it is an attempt to describe a woman's inebriation from within, which was certainly a rarity in the English novel of the time. Later on in the book, a hangover is also described from Kate's point of view:

> With vague movements of hands, she endeavoured to fasten the front of her dress, and with a groan rolled herself out of the light. But her efforts to fall back to insensibility were unavailing. Implacable as the dawn that slips and swells through the veils of night, a pale waste of consciousness forced itself upon her. First came the curtains of the bed, then the bare blankness of the wall, and then the great throbbing pain that lay like a lump of lead just above her forehead. Her mouth was clammy as if it were filled with glue, her limbs weak as if by violent blows they had been

> beaten to a pulp. She was all pain, but, worse still, a horror, huge and black, of her life crushed and terrified her, until she buried her face in the pillow and wept and moaned for mercy. Nevertheless, to remain in bed was impossible. The pallor of the place was intolerable, and sliding her legs over the side she stood, scarcely able to keep her feet. The room swam as if in a mist; she held her head with clasped hands; the top of it seemed to be lifting off. . . . Raising her face suddenly from her arms, she hitched up her falling skirts, and seeing at that moment the bottle on the table, she went into the sitting-room and poured herself out a little, which she mixed with water. (298)

Vivid as this is, it still contains a fair amount of figurative language: the "dawn that slips and swells through the veils of night," "a pale waste of consciousness," "like a lump of lead," "as if it were filled with glue," "as if . . . beaten to a pulp," "a horror, huge and black," "as if in a mist" and "seemed to be lifting off" are evocative but not literal. Her drinking progresses, however, and the details of it become more and more graphic and distasteful until finally she becomes one of the few characters to vomit in English fiction. This scene, which is also presented from Kate's point of view, is unrelieved by metaphor:

> Weak and sick she leaned back upon the hard cushions of the clattering cab. Her mouth was full of water, and the shifting angles of the streets produced on her an effect similar to sea-sickness. London rang in her ears; she could hear a piano tinkling; she saw Dick directing the movements of a line of girls. Then her dream was brought to an end by a gulp. Oh! the fearful nausea; and she did not feel better until, flooding her dress and ruining the red velvet seats, all she had drunk came up. The vomit, however, brought her great relief, and had it not been for a little dizziness and weakness, she would have felt quite right when she arrived at the stage-door. She was in a terrible state of dirt and untidiness, but she noticed nothing; her mind was

> now fully occupied in thinking what she should say, first to the stage-doorkeeper, and then to her husband. (300)

Joseph Hone, who refers to *A Mummer's Wife* as a "genuine and successful attempt to apply French Naturalistic method to a description of English life," remarks that "In fact Moore was the first real adventurer on this ground; for the other English writers who sought assistance from the methods of the Naturalists shrank from carrying them out to their logical conclusion. Gissing would never have written of Kate Ede vomiting over her dress. . . . Courage was needed for this in the high Victorian period."[41] Gissing's own novel dealing with middle-class female alcoholism, *The Odd Women* (1893), confirms the accuracy of Hone's observation. In it, Gissing surrounds the subject with an air of mysterious discretion, treating it as something too shameful to mention. The Madden sisters speak of Virginia's "wretched state," for example, in the following way: "How can we help her, Monica? Won't you make a sacrifice for the poor girl's sake? . . . She worries so about you, and then tries to forget the trouble—you know how."[42]

Towards the end of *A Mummer's Wife*, Kate sinks to the lowest depths of alcoholism, and Moore does not spare us in recounting her progressively worsening condition. The latter is no longer described from Kate's point of view; she has become an object, to be described from the outside. When Kate and Dick are dismissed from their lodgings, for example, we see her attempting to dress herself:

> Staggering on to the floor, Kate sought for her stockings. . . . Dirty, limp petticoats a week old were tied

> anyhow around her waist. Garters could not be found, and a piece of the lining of a dress was used instead. The dress was bundled on like a bag, and the boots were left unbuttoned. (308)

The subtle shifts from the active voice ("Kate sought for her stockings") to the passive ("Dirty, limp petticoats . . . were tied," et cetera), and from the possessive ("her stockings") to the definite article ("the dress," "the boots") help to de-personalize Kate, dissociating her from the reader, the narrator and even from herself. Finally, Dick leaves her and she becomes itinerant; in fact, she has turned into a "low" character every bit as brutalized as Zola's Gervaise:

> Miserable as a homeless dog, she rolled from one lodging to another;—after a few days driven forth from the lowest for dirt and dissoluteness. Under the pressure of such excesses her disease increased daily, and to keep pace with her exhaustion she was forced to take increased doses of stimulants. (348)

Predictably, Kate's final illness and death, with which the novel ends, is depicted as graphically as the deaths of either Emma Bovary or Nana. The description of Ralph's illness with which the novel opens is mild by comparison:

> Facing the light, close up against the wall, her stomach enormously distended by dropsy, Kate lay delirious. From time to time her arms, wasted now to mere bones, were waved. . . . She was now a dreadful thing to look upon. Her thin hair hung like a wisp, and she had lost so much that the prominent temples were large with a partial baldness. The rich olive complexion was now changed to a dirty yellow, around the nose and mouth the skin was pinched and puckered. . . . Her eyes were dilated, and she tried to

> raise herself up in bed. Her withered arms were waved to and fro, and in the red gloom shed from the ill-smelling paraffin lamp the large, dimly-seen folds of the bed-clothes were tossed to and from by the convulsions that agitated the whole body. Another hour passed away, marked, not by the mechanical ticking of a clock, but by the cavernous breathing of the woman as she crept to the edge of death. At last there came a sigh, deeper and more prolonged, and with it she died. (350, 352)

Kate is now indeed "a dreadful thing to look upon." The atmosphere that surrounds her death, however, is subtly different from that which surrounds the deaths of Emma or Nana. Emma's death seems to be a fitting punishment for her foolishness, the culmination of Flaubert's disgust for her, and Nana's corpse becomes a fitting symbol of the corruption of a whole society. In either case, there is an implied judgment by the narrator, a statement about a certain kind of woman in one case and about a certain way of life in the other. This sense of a pitiless, almost vindictive satisfaction by the narrator increases the horror of the sordid physical details in each of these episodes. Kate's death-scene, while unpleasant, evokes no similar sense of horror or judgment but merely one of pitiable sadness. Her coy little "Serpolette" song, which has now become a leitmotif bearing a considerable load of irony,[43] is sung once again:

> Scenes the most diverse were heaped together in the complex confusion of a nightmare, ideas the most opposed were intermingled. . . . It was like a costume ball, where chastity grinned from behind a mask that vice was looking for, while vice hid his nakedness in some of the robes that chastity had let fall. Thus up and down, like dice thrown by demon players, were rattled the two lives, the

> double life that this weak woman had so miserably lived through. But a final blending had to be reached, a point where the two became one, and this was touched when she commenced to sing her famous song,
>
> "Look at me here, look at me there,"
>
> alternately with the Wesleyan hymns. Sometimes in her delirium, she even fitted the words of one on to the tune of the other. (351-52)

This scene, in fact, indicates the "meaning" of Kate's downfall better than any of the narrator's many attempts to explain it. The confusion between "chastity" and "vice," the role-playing indicated by the "costume ball," the suggestion of her life being controlled by chance (a "demon player" throwing dice) and the coquette's song sung to a hymn tune all symbolize the dichotomies of Kate's life perfectly.

The mood of melancholy rather than revulsion which attends this final scene of *A Mummer's Wife* is partly a result of attitudes or events which have occurred earlier in the novel. For one thing, no sense of punishment is involved, and Moore is able to report his character's death far more dispassionately and objectively than either Flaubert or Zola, partly because Kate is a less corrupt and more likeable individual than either Emma or Nana. For another thing, Kate's story has not been one of unrelieved disgust from the beginning, so that her death is invested with a certain amount of meaning, unlike the deaths of Germinie, Gervaise or Thérèse, for example. Germinie and Gervaise have lived like dogs and they die like dogs, a fact which surprises no one, while Thérèse and Laurent's mutual suicide-murder is the logical climax to the grisly tale of their love. Moore's narrator makes no comment about Kate's death, nor does he need to; he merely reports it, and yet his report avoids both the implied anger and the extreme coldness of the naturalists. It is a nice (and fairly complex) tempering of the naturalistic formula of objectivity to suit the framework of English fiction, which brings me to an examination of the function of the narrator throughout the novel.

3. The Narrator

Flaubert's dictum that "L'artiste doit être dans son oeuvre comme Dieu dans la création, invisible et tout-puissant; qu'on le sente partout, mais qu'on ne la voie pas"[44] was adopted enthusiastically by the naturalists in their quest for scientific objectivity in the novel. "The naturalistic novelist never interferes," says Zola, "any more than the savant [scientist]. This moral impersonality of a work is all-important. . . ."[45] As I have already indicated, in some ways Moore's narrator in *A Mummer's Wife* is more purely objective than those of the naturalists themselves. In the large number of authorial intrusions throughout his novel, however, Moore falls far short of the naturalists' formula. These sudden and unnecessary explanations by the narrator appear as awkward excrescences on the otherwise smooth surface of the narrative, a fact Moore obviously recognized when he excised virtually all of them in his revision of *A Mummer's Wife* in 1917.

Some of these authorial comments seem to have very little to do with the tale Moore is telling. He makes many gratuitous and unsupported generalizations about women, for instance, such as the following:

> Nearly all women consider it necessary to maintain to themselves and to others that they deeply regret having sinned. The delusion at once pleases and consoles them, and they cling to it to the last. (172)
>
> To a woman there is always an infinite charm in the society of a man to whom she never can, never intends to, give herself. The power that this platonic affection exercises over her is scarcely less ardent than the strongest sensual passion; it is the best poetry her nature is capable of, and for it many women will risk compromising themselves in their husband's eyes. The excitement of fancied victories obtained over themselves, of mock examinations of conscience, satisfies an ideal; and Kate, above most women, was subject to such nervous sentimentalities. (285)

Such pontificating only shows Amico Moorini at his worst, and mars the sense of objectivity so skillfully attained in the remainder of the novel. Even if Moore believes these inanities, they would be far more effective if they were illustrated by the events of the narrative. Kate's friendship with Montgomery, for instance, so effectively depicted in the chapter in which they ramble about the seaside together, is a very telling illustration about the value of Platonic love to Kate; but to deduce from this a generalization about the need of all women for Platonic love merely makes the narrator seems pompous at this point.

Even when the authorial intrusions are more directly related to the events of the novel, their attempted profundity seems pretentious. The narrator's world-weary observations about little Kate's funeral, for example, are entirely redundant:

> Of the many sad things in this world a child's funeral is perhaps the saddest. In a fleeting instant we see love, beauty, happiness, all of which we think in one dream-hour it would have attained, and we mourn the darkness, ashes,

> and worms that have overtaken it. Vain, perhaps, are these visions; it would have gained only what we ourselves have gained; but still it seems cruel to have been denied a part in the battle. Thus we dream for a moment, and then the little cortége passes on, scarcely noticed, untalked of, uncared for. A dozen people are the most that attend; there are no horses, no plumes. A man in front, another behind, carry what would be mistaken, were it not for its black dress, for a hand barrow. There is not much grief, only a few mother's tears, that is all. (263)

This almost sounds like Hardy; but how much more effective is Hardy's own portrayal of a child's funeral in *Jude*, in which the image of Sue standing in the children's half-filled grave renders comment unnecessary. In fact, Moore's description of Kate later on in the scene is very similar to Hardy's, and would have been sufficient on its own:

> Dick said nothing, but it made him despair to see her scrambling over the heaps of clay, and it seemed to him pretty well impossible that she would ever be able to play the Countess in *Olivette* on the morrow. (265)

More numerous than such general pronouncements, however, are the narrator's theoretical interpretations of the characters and their actions. Noël remarks that "l'auteur tient à souligner la leçon en termes autoritaires et pesés. . . . Des pages comme l'analyse psychologique de Kate dépassent leur but. L'auteur y intervient trop ourvertement pour montrer que l'héroine est prisonnière des influences de sa petite enfance, prisonnière de son caractère congénital,"[46] and this is certainly true. The narrative at times is cluttered with naturalist precepts.

We are told that

> In the woman of the people there is no intellectual advancement; she never learns to judge, to discriminate. What pleases her at one age does at another. Toil, if not sufficient to kill, preserves. The rich man changes, the peasant remains the same; and what is witnessable in centuries is witnessable in a single life. (86)

"The woman of the people" obviously refers to the notion of character as type; "What is witnessable in centuries is witnessable in a single life" refers to another favourite naturalistic theory, that of heredity. And again,

> Kate . . . was a simple woman of the people, whose febrile and vacillating imagination had on one side been crushed and repressed by the circumscribing and monotonous routine of her humble life, and on the other exalted by the fervour of a faith which, although it had not been able to mould her character, had nevertheless endowed it with a certain idealism of thought; and when to these influences are added the demoralising effects of hundreds of sentimental and romantic stories, read in her early youth, it will be understood with what abandonment of the senses, with what alienation of the brain, Kate threw herself into the enjoyment of this evening. . . . (107)

This adds the effect of environment to heredity; Moore has obviously not yet learned to show without telling. The narrator even tells us, apropos of the birth of Kate's child, that "The scene was at once real, ideal, cynical, and pathetic, a sample *slice* from the incongruous comedy *of life*" (252, my italics).

The narrator also theorizes directly about the characters, particularly Kate. Early in the novel he explains that

> Kate was dreamy, not to say imaginative. When she was a mere child she loved fairies, and took a vivid interest in goblins;

> and when afterwards she discarded these stories for others, it was not because it shocked her logical sense to read of a beanstalk a hundred feet high, but for a tenderer reason. . . . When the *London Journal* came for the first time across her way, with the story of a broken heart, her own heart melted with sympathy. And the more sentimental and unnatural the romance, the more it fevered and enraptured her. (38)

Later he explains the effect of the theatre environment on such a nature:

> The continual nerve-excitement in which she lived, the rich diet, the brandies and sodas supped in the dressing-rooms, the constant gratification of bodily pleasure, combined to produce in her naturally placid nature violent revolts and demands for passionate outbursts. (193)

Words such as "febrile," "nervous," "excited," "fevered" and "restless" are constantly applied to Kate, as they are to both Germinie and Thérèse. Like these naturalistic heroines, Kate is (or rather, becomes during the course of the novel) a pathological case-study, an interesting object for scientific or "experimental" analysis. Zola's intention in *Thérèse Raquin* was to depict "people completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by inexorable laws of their physical nature."[47] Kate's case is not quite this simple, as I have shown—in her case "physical nature" includes a certain fairly complex "moral" weakness—but her "décheance" nevertheless seems very closely modelled on naturalistic theories.

Chaikin sees Kate and Dick as prototypes of Thérèse and Laurent, the demonstration of "the deep-seated disturbances of a sanguine nature brought into contact with a nervous one."[48] Frederick Seinfelt also sees *A Mummer's Wife* primarily as the story of the conflict between Kate and her lover, asserting that "Kate's experiences with her two men, for all their anguish and despair, produce a sense of actual breathing life stronger than anything he would thereafter write, including his most read and most liked novel *Esther Waters*. . . . *A Mummer's Wife* is a devastatingly frank and shattering picture of male and female discord which can scarcely be equalled in any other work of English fiction."[49] These interpretations are only secondary issues, however, and not Moore's main "experiment" in *A Mummer's Wife*. Kate's fights with Dick are a symptom, not a cause, of her disorder. Just as *Madame Bovary* is unequivocally about Emma, Moore's novel is really about Kate, and the bulk of the narrator's theorizing has to do with the effect of a certain environment (that of the theatre) on a certain type of heredity (that of the "middle-class woman"). We are told again and again, especially toward the end of the novel, that "Kate had not become an actress, she was merely a middle-class woman veneered with Bohemianism . . ." (209). Finally, when the theatre company breaks up, we are told that "Bohemianism had achieved in her its last victory" (244), but when she meets Ralph again, "Kate's Bohemianism rushed away as water flows out of sight, when a sluice is suddenly raised, and she became again the middle-class working woman, ever thinking of, ever willing to work in the interests of her home" (344). These scattered intrusions are unnecessary, and in them Moore does for his readers what he should (according to naturalist precepts) trust them to do for themselves. As he himself once critically remarked of Henry James, "That which is firmly and clearly imagined needs no psychology."[50]

The most frequently quoted passage in the novel is one of these narratorial analyses, which is generally taken to encapsule the "moral" of the entire book. It is the one in which the narrator likens Kate to "a piece of Tottenham Court Road furniture":

> Kate Ede was the result of centuries of inherited customs and forms of thought, and when to this be added a touch of light-headedness, so ordinary in character that, in the shop in Hanley, it had passed unperceived, it will be understood how little fitted she was to effect the psychological and even physical changes that her new life demanded. She was the woman that nature turns out of her workshop by the million, all of whom are capable of fulfilling the duties of life, provided the conditions in which they are placed, that have produced them, remain unaltered. They are like cheap Tottenham Court Road furniture, equal to an ordinary amount of wear and tear so long as the original atmosphere in which they were glued together is preserved; change this and they go to pieces. This is precisely what had happened in the case of Kate Ede. Not a whit worse was she than others of her kind, but one of those million chances of which our lives are made had drifted Mr. Lennox across her life. From the first moment he entered her house the whole temperature of her blood and brain had been altered. But the introduction of a passion into a character does not add to it any more than a gust of wind does to a landscape. Principles may be overthrown as trees may be blown down. Morals may be perverted as landmarks may be destroyed, but no new element of vitality or strength is gained in either case. It was so with Kate. . . . (311)

This seems clear enough; Moore has taken an ordinary middle-class woman who is inclined towards romantic daydreams, made all her dreams come true, and stood back to see what she will do. What she "does" is not quite so simple as the narrator's analyses would have us believe, however.

In short, Moore's devotion to naturalistic principles in these narratorial intrusions is both overly zealous and mistakenly applied. It is true that these asides are mostly given in a detached, "analytical" manner; but that does not make them naturalistic.[51] Their detachable nature (they were virtually all culled from the later version) indicates how extraneous they are to the book's characters and events, which, when they are allowed to, speak for themselves. Moore's success in creating a naturalistic novel depends largely on the characterization of Kate, as it is her story that is being told, and I would now like to examine Moore's depiction of his main character.

4. Characterization

Kate Ede, generally seen by critics as a mixture of Emma Bovary and Gervaise Coupeau, is a curiously elusive character. Lloyd Fernando, who thinks that *A Mummer's Wife* is on the whole an unoriginal novel, admits that Kate is "an intriguing heroine."[52] I would like to examine Moore's main character both in light of her literary sources and as an autonomous figure. To what extent is she a naturalistic "type" of character? What is the narrator's—and the reader's—attitude toward her? How much do we like her or get to "know" her? How well does she know herself, and what does she "learn" during the course of the novel?

When the novel was first published, Moore's portrayal of Kate resulted in a somewhat typical Victorian reaction by his contemporary readers. David Christie Murray complains of the characters in *A Mummer's Wife* that

> [Moore] . . . has never once got under the skin of any one of his people. . . .
>
> He neither loves nor hates, nor, indeed, except for his own sake, is for a second even faintly interested. He is there to make a book, and these people offer excellent material for a book. He is astonishingly industrious, and his minuteness is without end, but he never warms to his subject. His aim, in short, is one of total artistic selfishness. It is very likely that he would accept this statement of his standpoint, and would justify it as the only standpoint of an artist. But it is answerable for the fact that his pages are sterile of laughter and tears, of sympathy and of pity.[53]

He is right, of course, about Moore wishing to avoid responses of "laughter and tears, . . . sympathy and pity." Following Zola's precepts, Moore was trying to create characters "completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by the inexorable laws of their physical nature." In the service of this aim, "animal" epithets are attached to Kate (as well as to Dick) throughout the novel, but especially in the section dealing with Kate's alcoholism. Kate among the actors is described as "a tame sparrow among swallows" (139) and later she is "docile as a sheep"; when Dick is tired from walking he is likened to a "jaded horse" and a "scavenger dog" (253) and often he is compared to a bull (280, 293) or an elephant (292). Toward the end of the novel this animal imagery increases as Kate becomes more and more brutalized. In their many battles, she and Dick are described as "two quarrelling animals" (274) and "a lumbering bull striving to escape from an attacking feline creature" (293) and she tears at Dick "as a starving beast tears raw flesh" (299). Finally, Kate is described as "living upon herself like an animal" (290); she has a "canine tooth" (312) and the "instinct of an animal to revenge" (315), is like a tiger (314), a panther (316), "a tired animal thinking of its stable" (337), "a jaded animal" (346) and finally becomes "limp as a wet chicken" (320) and "miserable as a homeless dog" (348).

This is an amazing array of beasts, but in the end it does not convey the impression of the characters' bestiality. Peter Ure remarks that

> In *A Mummer's Wife*, despite the Zolaesque high relief in which much of the detail is drawn, there is surprisingly little feeling that the characters are merely stalking-horses for the manners. Though Moore may think of his characters as typical and sometimes lectures us on the middle-class woman and similar topics with the prescribed objectivity, their social roles are countervailed by their individualities.[54]

This is true. In spite of Moore's animal imagery and naturalistic analyses, Kate remains stubbornly different from typical naturalistic characters-as-types. In order to see why this is so, it is necessary to examine the narrator's attitude to and presentation of Kate; but first it is interesting to note a seeming anomaly in this regard in the three French novels I discussed earlier.

Much as the naturalistic novelists wished to avoid idiosyncrasy in their portrayal of character and to examine "typical" personality configurations (in order "to master certain phenomena of an intellectual and personal order,"[55] as Zola put it), their earliest attempts were failures in this respect. In their "diagnosis of social ills," Flaubert, the Goncourts and Zola in fact created characters who were not only exceptional, but extremely exceptional. Despite Flaubert's repeated declaration that "art is not made for the depiction of exceptions," Emma Bovary is an undeniably extraordinary character. Baudelaire sees her as having "real greatness" as a result of her "masculine" nature,[56] and when Henry James asserts that "the nature of her consciousness and the play of her mind . . . not only . . . represent *her* state; . . . they represent the state . . . of all persons like her, persons romantically determined,"[57] he seems to be referring to her as a symbol (with attendant greatness) rather than as a mere type. Germinie Lacerteux is also exceptional, exceptional as a result of her extreme ugliness and the macabre cruelty of her situation. As Auerbach points out, "As soon as we examine the content [of *Germinie Lacerteux*] carefully, we recognize the driving force to be an aesthetic and not a social impulse. The subject treated is not one which concerns the center of the social structure; it is a strange and individual marginal phenomenon."[58] *Thérèse Raquin*, as well, contains characters whose carnal appetites are so extraordinary that the characters themselves ultimately seem bizarre rather than typical; certainly no diagnosis of a common "social ill" could be made from a study of Thérèse and Laurent. It was not until later, in novels such as *L'Assommoir*, that Zola could truly be said to portray "types."

I have already commented on Kate's "ordinariness" in comparison both to these three early naturalistic novel-heroines and to Isabel Sleaford. Kate is ordinary, but is she also a generalized "type" rather than a unique individual? Emma, Germinie and Thérèse are individualized because of their narrators' fascination with their particular neuroses, and Isabel is individualized because of Miss Braddon's affection for her; what is Moore's attitude to Kate, and how does it compare to Zola's complete indifference to Gervaise, for example?

Peter Ure sees Moore's stance toward his main character as "the studied cruelty of an aesthete or of a practitioner of the scientific novel";[59] Stuart Sherman describes it as "contemptuous pity";[60] and Phyllis Harris Duckworth characterizes it as "compassion" and thinks that *A Mummer's Wife* is possibly a tragedy.[61] Such vastly varied critical opinions indicate the difficulty of pinpointing Moore's opinion of Kate, and this, as I shall show, is one of the novel's most naturalistic features.

The narrator describes Kate's sentimentality, the cause of all her troubles, in the very first scene of the novel, in which she feels much tenderness towards the suffering Ralph because of his illness. Although he acknowledges that it is unrealistic ("She forgot how he often rendered her life miserable, well nigh unbearable, by small vices, faults that defy definition, unending selfishness and unceasing irritability " [13]), the narrator describes this tenderness as "one of those simple and ardent emotions that spring from the human heart like flowers from the earth" (13). This hardly sounds like anything Emma Bovary would ever be likely to feel (although it sounds very much like something one of the gentle characters in Moore's later fiction would be likely to feel). The note of tenderness is unmistakable; Moore obviously does not actively dislike Kate as Flaubert does Emma, nor is he coldly indifferent to her as Zola is to Gervaise. The warmth of such statements is offset, however, by the condescending tone of the narrator in other descriptions of Kate's romanticism, such as the following: "With mild sentiments of regret, she read through the slips of newspaper. They were all the same, but as long as any one was spoken of as being the nearest and the dearest Kate was satisfied. Even the bonbon mottoes, of which there were large numbers, drew from her the deepest sighs" (90). Obviously Moore does not feel the same indulgent fondness for his heroine that Miss Braddon feels for Isabel. Of *The Doctor's Wife*, in fact, the narrator in *A Mummer's Wife* remarks that "The grotesque mixture of prose and poetry, both equally false, used to enchant Kate, and she always fancied had she been the heroine of the book that she would have acted in the same way" (39). The point, however, is that she does not "act in the same way." Kate is not, as Heywood believes, "proof against the temptations of the world."[62]

While the narrator is tolerant of Kate's sentimentality (which is stressed until the end of the novel, when the prostitutes call her "Sentimental Kate" [347]), this does not stop him from letting it lead her into trouble. It causes her to run away with Dick with unrealistic expectations ("She was going away, with Dick, to be loved and live happy for ever" [137]), and the reality does not fit the dream.

> The world is for ever out of tune with our desires, and although her present surroundings were by many times

> handsomer than those she had left, the sum of inward and outward contradictions remained as evenly balanced as ever. The hazy dream she had dreamed of love and elopement had not been accomplished, and the brutality of every proof of this wounded her sensibilities.
>
> But of the secret of her disappointment she was nearly unconscious. . . . (147)

This last statement, "of the secret of her disappointment she was nearly unconscious," is significant, as it indicates a typical "distancing" device that Moore uses frequently in his portrayal of Kate. The attitude of a narrator toward his characters is revealed not only through direct authorial commentary, but also through the characters' thoughts and feelings and the extent of the narrator's concurrence in such thoughts and feelings. As soon as Isabel renounces Roland, for example, Miss Braddon endorses her "good" thoughts; Flaubert's disgust with Emma's musings, on the other hand, is evident throughout *Madame Bovary*. The revelation of their thoughts and feelings is also primarily what "individualizes" the main characters of most Victorian novels. Naturalistic characters, as Zola says in the Preface to *Thérèse Raquin*, were to have "a complete absence of soul." Zola himself generally managed to effect this; as Brian Nicholas remarks, Gervaise is devoid of nearly all mental processes.[63]

It is difficult to discern Moore's attitude to Kate because, although she is a more intelligent and more likeable character than Gervaise, her mental processes seem to be almost as non-existent. Many of her thoughts, in fact, are obscured in exactly the same way as they are in the above passage; it is not at all unusual for Kate to be "nearly unconscious" of why she is disappointed. Moore uses her romantic dreaminess as a convenient device for increasing Kate's distance from the narrator, from the reader, and ultimately from herself. Thus the narrator's objectivity towards Kate is ensured, and the reader is effectively prevented from becoming too close to her. One of the earliest of these passages, which occurs even before Kate meets Dick (the object of many of her reveries) is entirely characteristic:

> Her cup of hot tea was uppermost in her mind, and she hoped that Mrs. Ede would not keep her long waiting. Then as her *thoughts detached themselves*, she remembered the actor whom they expected that afternoon. . . . As the word trouble went through her mind she paused, arrested by *a passing feeling of sentimentality*; but it *explained nothing, defined nothing,* only touched her as a breeze does a flower, and *floated away*. The *dreamy warmth* of the fire *absorbed her more direct feelings*, and for some moments she dozed in *a haze of dim sensuousness and emotive numbness. As in a dusky glass* she saw herself a tender, loving, but unhappy woman; . . . . Whenever she attempted to find definite shapes in the glowing colours, they *vanished in a blurred confusion.* (21-22, my italics)

The italicized terms, which indicate the extent of Kate's vagueness, are ones that occur again and again throughout the novel, especially at significant times in Kate's life. When Dick suggests kissing her at the pottery factory, "she had neither the will nor the sensation of what she did. . . . A vague feeling of how nice, how kind he was, rushed through her" (64); after she leaves the factory, "Subjectively, nothing was clear; a veil hung, as it were, between her and herself" (68); when she discusses Dick with Miss Hender, "She wished to leave everything, the facts as well as her conception of them, in the vague" (78); after she realizes she is in love with Dick, "her character gradually underwent a change" but "There was no internal struggle, no analysis of mind, no . . . conscious change" (86). The word "unconsciously" is applied to Kate's thought processes many times, and she is often "surprised" or "astonished" by her own reactions. As she indulges in romantic daydreaming about her lodger, she does not even recognize herself:

> By times, when she remembered the pious, religious life she had been brought up in, she started, unable to understand her present attitude of mind, and then when she looked into her own soul she saw there a wicked, violent woman whom she did not know. . . . (114)

This dreamy vagueness effectively prevents Kate from being too individualized. We do not identify with her, because we are not given her thoughts; in effect, we are told over and over again that she does not have any. Her dreamy reveries in church and at the theatre (two occasions on which we are admitted to her inner workings) can hardly be said to constitute "thoughts." At church,

> Everything swayed before her in a mist; the heads of the congregation appeared like a dark sea, and the white walls were clear spaces deep, in her imagination, as the depths of the sky where passed a multitude of infinitesimal sensations—words spoken, tender answers that gave place at once to pleadings and kisses, sensations like soft odours, desires as fragile as the tints of roses; things and places the most different flowed in and out of each other, producing a confused but harmonious vision of audible colour and visible sound; and the constantly recurring phrase, "He will be back in three months," shed shuddering gleams of silver upon her dream as will a passing wind over a calm sea. (84)

Her reaction to the first performance she sees at the theatre is similar:

> [The music] was sung separately and in unison, and it penetrated, winding and unwinding itself, into the deepest recesses of Kate's mind. It seduced like a deep slow perfume; it caressed with the long undulations of a beautiful snake and the mystery of a graceful cat. It went and it came, stretching forth invisible hands, as might sirens leaning out of blue ocean waters; it whispered, as they might, of fair pleasure places where scent, and music, and love are one, where lovers never grow weary, and where kisses endure for ever. She was conscious of deep self-contentment, of dreamy idleness, of sad languor, and the charm to whch she abandoned herself resembled the enervations of a beautiful climate, the floating softness of a church, and she yearned for her lover and the fanciful life of which he was the centre as one might for some ideal fatherland. On the sweet current of the music she was carried far away, far beyond the great hills into the land of sleep, dream, and haze, and a wonderful tenderness swam within her as loose and as dim as the green sea depths that a wave never stirs. She struggled, but it was only as one in a dream strives to lift himself out of the power that holds; and when the conductor waved his stick for the last time, and the curtain came down amid deafening applause, irritated and enervated, she shrank from Miss Hender, as if anxious not to be wholly awakened.

These flights of fancy are couched in beautifully poetic language, but they do not help us to think of her as anything but a sentimental middle-class woman, which is of course exactly how Moore wants us to think of her.

Similarly, there are very few instances of free indirect speech in *A Mummer's Wife*, and those that do exist, not surprisingly, are about fantasy rather than reality. At her wedding, for example, Kate's thoughts consist of the following romantic imaginings:

> What more could she desire? She would go on acting, and Dick would continue to love her. By some special interposition of Providence all the hazards of existence over which she might have fallen appeared to have been swept aside. What broader road could a woman hope to walk in than the one that lay before her in all its clear and bland serenity? Oh, how good God had been to her! how good He was going to be! Her child! his child! What sweetness there was in the words! and what a tie it would be to them! what a source of future happiness! (226)

The narrator's pitying irony is apparent here, as it is in Kate's angry justifications for drinking and fighting with Dick later on in the book. The following, for example, is also an instance of free indirect speech:

> Ah! if the baby had lived she would have had something to live for; but now she was alone, she was deserted. Dick cared for her no longer. It was very cruel. What had she done to merit such unhappiness? . . . . If she did drink, it was jealousy that drove her to it. Why wasn't he faithful to her? Had she not given up everything for him? Why did he want to be always running after a lot of other women? Where was he now, she'd like to know? . . . . Oh, good heavens! how her head was splitting! What would she not give to be all right just for a couple of hours, just long enough to go and tell that beast of a husband of hers what a pig he was, and let the whole theatre know how he was treating his wife. It was he who drove her to drink. Yes, she would go and do this. Her head, it was true, seemed as if it were going to roll off her shoulders, but a good sponging would do it good, and then a bottle or two of soda would put her quite straight—so straight that nobody would know that she had touched a drop. (289, 299-300)

None of these glimpses of Kate's inner self shed much light on her character, and we neither like nor dislike her because of them.

Although she is not exactly a human animal, then, Kate is a naturalistic "type" rather than a "character" in the English sense, and her story is therefore not the "tragedy" that Duckworth suggets. Moore (and the reader) does not care enough about her for that, even though his attitude is not the "studied cruelty" that Ure suggests. Perhaps Sherman's "contemptuous pity" comes closest to an accurate description of Moore's attitude, although "contemptuous" might be omitted; in *A Mummer's Wife* may be discerned, I think, the beginnings of what Graham Hough would later see as the "charity" of *Esther Waters*.

In any case, Moore's use of Kate's vagueness as a distancing device in *A Mummer's Wife* is extremely skillful. It ensures the "objectivity" and "scientific attitude" of the novel far better than the narrator's constant reminders of these things, which are simply irritating. It is likely that Moore "borrowed" this device from Zola; in the introduction to his translation of *Thérèse Raquin*, L. W. Tancock comments on "the astonishing vagueness of this young man [Zola] who claimed to be doing a piece of exact scientific writing. Some irresistible urge seems to force him to use such expressions as *une vague sensation de . . ., une sort de vague impression de. . ., une espèce de. . ., je ne sais quel. . . ,* as though a plain, precise noun or adjective would be inadequate."[64] Thérèse, like Kate, has no very definite thoughts or feelings with which the reader can identify, even though she is an outstanding character in other ways.

This tendency toward vagueness also prevents Kate from understanding what is happening to her, and why. Even when she tries to make sense of her situation, all that happens is that "She saw in herself a sort of helpless martyr to circumstances, and *unconsciously* she drew comparisons between the life she led and the life she had hoped to attain" (210 [my italics]). Even at the end of the novel, when she tries to explain to Montgomery what has happened to her, all she can say is

> "You have been very kind—oh! very kind, and I often think of it. Ah! everybody has, all my life long, been very good to me; it is I alone who am to blame, who am in fault. I have, I know I have, been very wicked, and I don't know why. I did not mean it; I know I didn't, for I am not at heart a wicked woman. I suppose things must have gone against me; that's about all." (327)

This echoes the fatalistic conclusion of Germinie Lacerteux that "Je suis malheureuse...Je n'ai pas de chance...Moi de'abord rien ne me réussit."[65] In the revised version of the novel, without the narrator's explanation of the inevitability of such a change of environment on such a temperament, this in fact seems to constitute the "moral" of the novel, insofar as it has one. Kate's downfall does not seem to be as inevitable as Moore would have us believe, yet she seems to have had very little power to stop it.

Her "déchéance," in fact, is interesting. It is clearly "her own fault," and yet she never appears to have freedom of choice. As Joseph Hone remarks,

> A lesser artist would have made the world appear cruel to Kate's drink-sodden mind; but the good-natured helpfulness of friends, land-ladies, doorkeepers and streetwalkers in the closing London scenes only increases Kate's sense of isolation by making it obvious even to her that her sole enemy is her own weakness of character.[66]

This "weakness of character," however, bears little relation to what Louis Cons refers to as "the swish of the whip of Man's Slavedrivers, Hunger and Sex."[67] Kate's weakness is more complex than this, and has nothing much to do with her physical "animal" nature at all. Moore himself recognized this years later; he remarks in *Salve* that "The Mummer's Wife declines, for she is without sufficient personal conscience to detach herself from the conventions in which she has been brought up."[68] "Personal conscience" is a far cry from the determinism of the piece of "Tottenham Court Road furniture" which automatically disintegrates in a new atmosphere, and seems to suggest that Kate's failure to adapt to bohemianism *was* her fault. Passages in the novel such as the following, however, doubly confuse the issue:

> The change that had come over her since she left Hanley was apparent. Physically, the change was for the better. Her cheeks were fuller, the lines of her face softer; her eyes had become less monotonous in colour, and more provoking in expression: and she smiled more readily. Psychologically, the change was even more marked. The broad, simple lines on which her views of life and things had formerly been based, had become twisted, broken, and confused; her tastes were now more complex and her desires more febrile. Even her principles of honesty had become shaken. Anecdotes of clever swindles no longer wounded her feelings; she now listened to and laughed at them with the rest. The middle-class woman, in a word, had disappeared, and the Bohemian taken her place; and had it not been for the anger with which she repulsed all levity of conversation, and the cold way she frowned upon the spicey little stories, the delight of theatrical supper-tables, the closest scrutiny might have failed to find a clue wherewith to trace her back to her origin. But regarding the moral question, she seemed daily to grow more severe, and many were the disputes Kate and Dick had on the subject. (194)

Psychologically, this passage seems to be saying, the change in Kate was *not* for the better. "Twisted, broken, and confused" hardly sounds like a desirable change, nor do "febrile" desires and "shaken" principles of honesty; yet her anger and the "cold way she frowned upon the spicey [sic] little stories" lead directly to her downfall. While Isabel Sleaford has choice and exercises it rightly, and Emma Bovary has choice and exercises it wrongly, Kate, it seems, has choice but lacks the strength of character to exercise it at all. Similarly, Kate fails to learn anything as a result of her experience; contrary to Noël's opinion that "cette personnalité n'est pas statique; elle évolue devant nous,"[69] Kate develops not at all in the course of the novel. Isabel learns her lesson (and so does the reader), Emma learns but too late, but Kate learns nothing at all. It is very difficult, therefore, to extract a "moral" from *A Mummer's Wife*; the notion of some early critics that the novel is a tract against the evils of alcoholism is simply inapplicable.

In Kate, then, Moore has created an enigma. She is a genuinely naturalistic character, in that she is more representative than individual, and we identify with her hardly at all; but the naturalism of her portrayal is countered to the extent that we care more about her than we do about Gervaise, for example, and Moore himself is not as clinically detached from her as Zola is from his characters. Apart from his narratorial intrusions, Moore is in fact as removed from his character as he can be without being indifferent. The result, as I have shown, is a more thoroughly neutral and objective novel than many of the works produced by the naturalists themselves.

Dick, even more clearly than Kate, is conceived as an embodiment of naturalistic principles. As I noted previously, he is an entirely more ordinary and mundane lover than either the heroic Roland Lansdell in *The Doctor's Wife* or the unscrupulous Laurent in *Thérèse Raquin*. Dick's uncomplicated animality, which is constantly stressed, is much different than the savage and predatory lust which motivates Laurent, because Dick's nature includes the simple human kindness which attracts Kate to him in the first place. He has a gigantic appetite and tends to be associated with food throughout the novel (while Kate is in childbirth, for example, Dick eats a huge meal), but he is just as often associated with helping other less fortunate characters. When the theatre company breaks up, for instance, "It was curious to see this huge man, who at a first impression would be taken for a mere mass of sensuality, rushing about putting buns and sandwiches into paper bags for . . . his poor chorus girls, encouraging them with kind words, and when the train began to move, waving them large and unctuous farewells with his big hat" (273).

In fact, Dick's is not so much an animal as a material nature. Unlike Kate, he is preoccupied almost exclusively with practical matters. When they decide to run away together, for example, and Kate is expressing her romantic longings, Dick takes her in his arms and "kissed her fervidly, though somewhat with the air of one who deems further explanation unnecessary." Kate continues her expostulations, however, and

> Dick could not help thinking that this was a little wearisome. He was very fond of Kate, and she liked him, and they were going away together; so far he knew, so much had been decided, and as far as he could see there the matter ended. Besides, it was getting very late; the third act must be now nearly over, and he had a lot of business to get through. (129)

In this way Dick acts as a deflationary foil for Kate's romanticism throughout the novel. This is a very important function for several reasons. First of all, in some sense the entire novel is an illustration of the pitfalls of such romanticism. Also, the dose of "reality" administered thus humourously instead of harshly prevents the novel from becoming a tragedy; and finally, the fact that such a deflationary point of view is provided by a character instead of by the narrator himself (as it is in *The Doctor's Wife*, for example) enhances the narrator's objectivity.

The prosaic Dick simply does not understand Kate's sentimental yearnings, and he continues to be puzzled by them throughout the novel. He wonders, for example, about her rigid views on "moral" matters:

> Dick congratulated himself on the choice he had made, and assured himself that he would never know again the ennui of living alone. She was one of the prettiest women you could see anywhere, and luckily not too exacting. In fact she hadn't a fault if it weren't that she was a bit cold, and he couldn't understand how it was; women were not generally cold with him. The question interested him profoundly, and as he considered it his glance wandered from the loose blue masses of hair to the white satin shoe which she held to the red blaze. (159)

Dick reduces Kate's moral scruples to "coldness" because any other explanation of her conduct simply never occurs to him. Similarly, when

Kate later wants to get married because they are leading "a life of sin," Dick, "out of his animal repose . . . smiled at this argument" (216).

Such a phlegmatic temperament throws Kate's febrile sentimentality into even sharper relief, and finally acts as an irritant on her inflamed nerves. During one of their quarrels later on in the book, we are told that

> What she wanted of him she knew not, but with a longing that was nearly madness she desired to possess him wholly; she yearned to bury her poor aching body, throbbing with the anguish of nerves, in that peaceful hulk of fat, so calm, so grand, so invulnerable to pain, marching amid, and contented in, its sensualities, as a stately bull grazing amid the pastures of a succulent meadow. (280)

To some extent, then, Kate and Dick represent, like Thérèse and Laurent, a nervous and a sanguine nature; but as I have already remarked, Dick's "comfortableness" is very different from Laurent's brutality, and the main concern of the narrative is with Kate herself, quite apart from her relationship with Dick.

Perhaps most importantly, the inclusion of Dick's point of view in various episodes provides much of the novel's humour. His preoccupation with practical matters, for example, leads him to think of the best way of smuggling Kate past Ralph at the train-station when they are eloping ("He . . . thought of wrapping a railway rug around his newly-acquired wife, and carrying her thus concealed in his arms; but that would not do. . . . Mr. Ede would be sure to ask what he had there—the feet would be sticking out" [133]) and he cannot help thinking of practicalities even at little Kate's funeral:

> "Oh, Dick," [Kate] said, "to think they'll put her down into the ground, and that we shall perhaps never even see her grave again. We may be a hundred miles from here to-morrow, or after."
>
> Dick, who had had credit of the undertaker, looked around uneasily. . . . Kate . . . appeared much consoled, and she mumbled so many prayers that, involuntarily, Dick began to consider the time it would take to learn a part of equal length. . . .

Like Kate's, such thoughts are hardly profound, and although Dick is a likeable enough character, we certainly do not identify with him. And, also like Kate's, Dick's thoughts when they do verge on serious matters are cleverly obscured. When Kate cries out in labour that she will never love him again, for example,

> The pealing humanity of the cry touched the fat mummer through all the years of gross sensuality, through the indigestion of his big dinner, and, struck by the sense of her words, he shuddered, remembering that it was he, not the innocent child, who was the cause of this outrageous suffering. Was it possible, he asked himself, that she would never love him again? He didn't know. Was it possible that he was culpable? Strange notions respecting the origin, the scheme, the design of the universe, flashed *in dim chiaro-oscuro* through his thoughts, and for a moment he pondered, philosopher like, on the remote causes and the distant finalities of men and things. (252, my italics)

And at Kate's deathbed, another situation conducive to deep and serious thought, "He wanted to say something nice and kind, but [Mrs. Forest's] presence put everything out of his head, and *so his ideas became more than ever disjointed, his thoughts wandered*. . . . " (352, my italics). Unlike Kate's consciousness, Dick's is not obscured by dreamy reveries;

he is simply not inclined to think deeply about things in the first place.

On the whole, the characters in *A Mummer's Wife* mark an important difference between this novel and the novels of "English naturalism" that were to become popular in the years that followed. Kate and Dick are not individualized to the extent that the reader loses his objectivity toward them, nor do they become vehicles for the narrator's social indignation. Indeed, as the narrator goes out of his way to tell us, he has no social indignation; what happens to Kate is no one's fault, but simply the "scientific" result of the reaction of a certain kind of temperament to a certain kind of change in environment.

5. Milieu

As I noted earlier, Moore did two kinds of research in preparation for *A Mummer's Wife*: he stayed in Hanley (a pottery town) and he toured with a travelling theatre company. The meeting of these two milieux, the factory town and the world of the theatre (in the characters of Kate and Dick) constitute the plot of *A Mummer's Wife*, and the precision of detail with which these two fictional worlds are delineated constitutes one of the most obviously naturalistic elements of the novel. As Furst and Skrine remark in their general study of naturalism, the naturalists "collected 'documentation' with care and depicted milieu in scrupulous detail, at times overloading their novels with technical matter. . . . The dominant tone is that of factual reportage, where things are more important than thoughts, and characters and happenings are seen from the outside, so to speak."[70]

The first of these worlds, the world of the potteries of Hanley, is made vividly clear when Kate goes with her lodger on a guided tour of one of the factories. This tour takes up most of a chapter, and, as it is filled with minutely-detailed descriptions of the various stages of pottery-making, it is potentially very tiresome. The various ways in which Moore enlivens this material constitute yet another modification of the naturalistic formula and result in a much more palatable chapter than he otherwise could have written. Take, for example, the making of jam-pots:

> An old man sat straddle-legged on a high narrow table just on a line with the window. He was covered with clay; his forehead and beard were plastered with it, and before him was an iron plate, kept continually whirling by steam, which he could stop by a pressure of his foot. Holding a lump of clay with both hands, he squeezed it into a long shape not unlike a tall ice, then forcing it down into the shape of a batter-pudding he hollowed it. Round and round went the clay, the hands forming it all the while cleaning and smoothing until it came out a true and perfect jam-pot, even to the little furrow round the top, which was given by a movement of the thumbs. He had been at work since seven in the morning, and the shelves round him were encumbered with the result of his labours. Everyone marvelled at the old creature's dexterity until he was fogotten in the superior attractions of the succeeding room. (60)

This certainly constitutes carefully-observed detail; Moore is obviously making good use of his research. To see how such a description varies from the more rigorous documentation of the naturalists, we can compare it to a passage describing gold chain-making in *L'Assommoir*:

> [Lorilleux] enroulait le fil préparé par sa femme autour d'un mandrin, une baguette d'acier très mince. Puis, il donna un léger coup de scie, qui tout le long du mandrin coupa le fil, dont chaque tour forma un maillon. Ensuite, il souda. Les maillons étaient posés sur un gros morceau de charbon de bois. Il les mouillait d'une goutte de borax, prise dans le cul d'un verre cassé, à côté de lui; et, rapidement, il les rougissait à la lampe, sous la flamme horizontale du chalumeau. Alors, quand il eut une centaine de maillons il se remit une fois encore à son travail menu, appuyé au bord de la cheville, un bout de planchette que le frottement de ses mains avait poli. Il ployait la maille à la pince, la serrait d'un côté, l'introduisait dans la maille supérieure déjà en place, la rouvrait à l'aide d'une pointe; cela avec une régularité continue, les mailles succédant aux mailles, si vivement, que la chaine s'allongeait peu à peu sous les yeux de Gervaise, sans lui permettre de suivre et de bien comprendre.[71]

One obvious difference between these two passages is stylistic; Zola's is phrased in the dry, precise language of a scientific experiment ("menu" and "poli" are the closest it comes to descriptive adjectives), while Moore's contains a certain amount of very descriptive figurative language: "a long shape not unlike a tall ice," "the shape of a batter-pudding." These homely, non-scientific comparisons (a "tall ice" and a "batter-pudding" are hardly scientific objects) contribute to the picturesque quality of Moore's description, as do the old man himself, with his clay-covered face and beard, and the "true and perfect" jam-pot with its "little furrow round the top." Apart from entertaining the reader, such figurative embellishments actually help us to "see" the process Moore is describing more clearly than that which Zola is describing; it is not surprising that the jam-pot maker's skill causes everyone to "marvel," whereas the chain-making takes place in front of Gervaise "sans lui permettre de suivre et de bien comprendre." The reader, too, does not quite comprehend the chain-making process. Moore's description, while it is not as "technical" as Zola's, is in fact more vivid.

Other parts of the pottery works, such as the storerooms, are described in a decidedly "impressionistic" way:

> The storerooms were wildernesses of white. Ridges of vases, mounds of basins and jugs, terraces of plates, formed masses of sickly white, through which rays of light were caught and sent dancing with a blinding brilliancy. Along the wall on the left hand side presses were over-charged with dusty tea-services. They were there as numerous as leaves in a forest. On the right were square grey windows, under which the convex sides of salad bowls, like gigantic snow-balls, sparkled in the sun; and from rafter to rafter, in garlands and clusters like grapes, hung countless mugs, gilded, and bearing a device suitable for children. Down the middle of the floor a terrace was built of dinner-plates, the edges burnished with light, the rest being in grey tint.
>
> Two rooms away a huge mound of chamber-pots formed an astonishing background, and against all this white effacement the men who stood on high ladders dusting the crockery came out like strange black climbing insects. (63)

Here the play of light on the crockery ("masses of sickly white, through which rays of light were caught and sent dancing with a blinding brilliancy," "sparkled in the sun," "a terrace . . . of dinner plates, the edges burnished with light, the rest being in a grey tint") reflects one of the impressionists' main preoccupations, that of the rendering of objects in natural light. Combined with the figurative language ("numerous as leaves in a forest," "the convex sides of salad-bowls, like gigantic snow-balls," "garlands and clusters like grapes," "like strange black climbing insects"), this creates a strikingly visual impression. A descriptive-impressionistic style, then, contributes to the subtle modification of the naturalistic reporting of technical details in *A Mummer's Wife*, softening the tone of scientific observation in a way that appeals to the reader's aesthetic sensibilities.

This "softening" of naturalism by such impressionist scene-painting may seem a contradiction, since Zola himself was an ardent champion of the impressionists (his discussion of impressionism in *Le Voltaire* in 1880 was significantly entitled "Le Naturalisme au Salon").[72] As Roland Stromberg points out, impressionism in painting and naturalism in literature were parallel phenomena, and "the expressionists of the 1900's were to rebel against impressionism in the name of an inward reality, just as symbolism rebelled against naturalism in literature."[73] Walter Miller also notes that the "impressionism" of *A Mummer's Wife* seems to qualify its naturalism; in his Preface to the 1966 Liveright edition he claims that "It's the non-naturalistic elements that give the novel its resonant qualities. Moore's years as an art student in Paris had prepared him to add impressionist touches, fleeting effects created by light and shade. . . . It is in the subjectivist and impressionist, rather than the naturalist, elements of *A Mummer's Wife* that Moore attains his best style."[74] But there is no necessary contradiction in the presence of both impressionist and naturalist elements; Zola himself often added impressionist touches to his novels, "fleeting effects created by light and shade," as in the description of the theatre crowd before Nana's début.[75] What marks the difference between Moore and Zola in this respect, and what Miller senses as "non-naturalistic," I think, is the fact that Moore's impressionistic scenes (such as the description of the light on the crockery) are often used to depict "beauty," while Zola's are not.

Moore also modifies the naturalistic tenet of observing only the externals of characters and happenings in this chapter. Despite its figurative language and impressionistic descriptions, the pottery tour would be ultimately very tedious, if it were not for the fact that most of it is narrated from Dick's point of view. He has talked Kate into going on the tour, but he is much more interested in her than in the factory:

> "It doesn't look very interesting," he said, as they stopped before an archway and looked into a yard filled with straw and packing cases. . . . "Do come," he said after a pause during which he looked at her eagerly. (57)

Thus internal and external realities are given equal importance. Whenever the descriptions of technical detail threaten to overwhelm the narrative, they are curtailed by Dick's lack of interest, as in the following passage:

> Two men were beating a heap of wet clay in order to insure a something in the bakery which nobody understood, but which the guide took some trouble to explain. . . . Mr. Lennox [Dick] wiped his face, and they were then hurried into a second cell, where unbaked dishes were piled all around upon shelves. It was said to be the dishmakers' place, and was followed by another and another room, all, Mr. Lennox thought, equally hot and uninteresting. He

> strove to escape from the guide, who drew him through the line of clergymen and remorselessly explained to him the mysteries of earthenware. (58)

The humour of Dick's discomfiture ("a something in the bakery which nobody understood, but which the guide took some trouble to explain"; "remorselessly explained to him the mysteries of earthenware") finally takes over the description of the tour, until the reader, as well as Dick, is far more interested in whether or not the latter will succeed in kissing Kate than in the "mysteries of earthenware." Kate, meanwhile, is preoccupied with happy childhood memories of the time when her mother used to work in the factory, so she does not suspect Dick's intentions.

The ensuing encounter, with which the visit to the factory culminates, is one of the most effective single episodes in the book. It is a telling combination of elements: the inner workings of each character (one prosaic and opportunistic, one frightened and angry) are reported at the same time that the reader is invited to see the characters from the outside and appreciate the ludicrousness of their situation. "Love among the chamber pots," as Anthony Farrow says of this episode, "is the subject for farce."[76] The chain of events that is set in motion by this initial kiss is far from being a farce, however. The humour in this scene—a result of the contrast between the astonished Dick's perception and that of the outraged Kate as well as of the overall absurdity of the situation—has a fairly subtle purpose. By making their first love-episode a largely comic one, Moore defuses the romantic potential in the episodes that follow, bringing them "down to earth," and at the same time makes full use of the factory setting which he has so elaborately described.

The episode is initially related from Dick's point of view, as he tries to recall romantic phrases with which to woo Kate:

> He strove to think of the famous love scene in *The Lady of Lyons*. But it was years since he had played the part, and he could only murmur something about reading no books but lovers' books, singing no songs but lovers' songs. Further he could not get, and remembering that the guide would be back in a few minutes, and inspired by Kate's pale face, he came to the conclusion that it would be absurd to let her go without kissing her properly. (65)

This is amusing; as soon as Dick actually kisses her, however, the point of view changes to Kate's and the mood shifts abruptly to one of violence, prefiguring the quarrels they will later have:

> She fought with the tenacity of a bulldog. Staggering backwards, she placed one hand on his throat, and with the other strove to catch at his moustache; she had given it a wrench that had brought tears into his eyes, but now he was pinioning her, and she could feel his breath upon her cheek, and see his big face approaching. Summoning up all her strength she strove to get away, but that moment, happening to tread on her skirt, her feet slipped. He made a desperate effort to sustain her, but her legs had gone between his, and a fall was imminent.

"She could . . . see his big face approaching" is undeniably threatening, and it is not surprising that Kate fights with "the tenacity of a bulldog" and with "all her strength"; but the contrast of her attitude with that of poor Dick, who only wanted to make use of the situation to "kiss her properly" is representative of her excessively romantic view of sex which eventually causes her downfall. "Her legs had gone between his" signals a return to the ludicrous aspect of the situation, however, and this is further emphasized by the crash of the crockery:

> The crash was tremendous. A pile of plates three feet high was sent spinning, a row of salad-bowls was kicked over, and then with a heavy stagger Mr. Lennox went over and into a dinner-service, the soup-tureen of which rolled gravely into the next room. . . .
>
> Kate rose pale and trembling from the debris of a bedroom set, and Mr. Lennox was lifted out of the dinner-service . . . . (66)

The adverb "gravely" attached to the animated soup-tureen is the only narrative comment that is necessary, and the only one Moore gives. Douglas Hughes presumably has such scenes in mind when he says that "Moore was one of the first British novelists to deal with the omnipresent power of sexuality in a wholly straightforward, unromantic manner."[77] It might be more accurate to say that Moore was one of the first late Victorian novelists to deal with sex in such a manner; but, in any case, the kiss in the pottery factory establishes this unromantic attitude early in *A Mummer's Wife*.

The point is that the technical details of this chapter, even though they are plentiful and precise, are rarely dwelt on purely for their own sake as they occasionally are in passages of naturalist novels such as the one I quoted earlier from *L'Assommoir*. In addition, the vivid visual descriptions of the crockery works and the farcical element of the "seduction" help to create a much less dismal atmosphere than that which exists in most naturalistic fiction. In this part of

A Mummer's Wife, at least, Moore can not be accused of what Martin Turnell describes as "that peculiar dreariness which infected the work of the Naturalists."[78]

Hanley, with its potteries and its dressmaker's shop in which Kate lives and works (and Moore fortunately spares us most of the technical details of dressmaking), comprises the milieu of the first third of the novel. The other carefully-researched milieu in the novel, that of the travelling theatre company, is also at once less dreary and less dispassionately reported than the theatre atmosphere in *Nana*, for example, which Chaikin suggests as its source. In this section of *A Mummer's Wife* it is partly the arrangement of the material and partly the narrator's attitude toward it that "soften" the naturalism. Moore gives us many more of the professional details of acting and much more of the theatre's technical jargon than Zola does (Zola is more concerned with Nana's career as a prostitute than with her career as an actress), but we are able to absorb most of it with interest. Moore never "loses" his reader in masses of technical detail, even though there is a fair amount of it: which music the actors will use, how it will be arranged, the working out of various scenes, the goings-on behind the stage and in the dressing rooms and the life style of the actors are all depicted at length.

The reader is introduced to this strange world through Kate, to whom even the brightly-coloured play advertisement on the wall across from her shop is exotic and "foreign":

> This glaring advertisement was headed "Morton and Cox's Operatic Company," and concluded with the announcement that *Madame Angot* would be played at the Queen's Theatre, Hanley. After a few moments spent in examining the picture, which puzzled her quite as much as it did the children, Kate suggested that it must have something to do with France. (23)

When she first shows Mr. Lennox the room she has for rent, she regards him with similar curiosity:

> Mr. Lennox turned to go. His manner indicated his Bohemian habits, for after all this waste of time he suddenly remembered that he had an appointment, and would probably miss it by about a quarter of an hour. (31)

"Something to do with France" and "his Bohemian habits" indicate things that are as far removed as possible from Kate's quiet middle-class existence in Hanley. This contrast is further emphasized when Dick later asks Kate to come and meet him at the theatre:

> "It was not my fault—the business I've had to do! I was in London yesterday, and only got back last night in time for the show. There was talk of our boss drying up, but I think it is all right. I'll tell you about that another time. . . . I want you to come to the theatre to-morrow night. Here are some tickets for the centre circle. I'll come and sit with you when I get the curtain up, and we'll be able to talk."
>
> The worm does not easily realize the life of the fly, and Kate did not understand. The rapidly stated facts whirled and bewildered her, and she could only say, in answer to his again repeated question:
>
> "Oh, I should like it so much, but it is impossible; if my mother-in-law heard of it I don't know what she would say." (77)

Kate is clearly overwhelmed by Dick's barrage of theatre talk; his "business" and the possibility of his "boss drying up" mean nothing at all to her. So far removed is she from this kind of knowledge that she and Dick are like two different species (the worm and the fly). The technical terminology—the actors' "shop talk"—is in fact never explained, either to Kate or to the reader, throughout the novel. The reader merely grows accustomed to it along with Kate. This invests the lives of the mummers with authenticity and mystery, and also helps to explain why Kate is so attracted to Dick.

The unsophisticated Kate, then, is the character through whose eyes the reader becomes familiar with the milieu of the theatre. Her total innocence about this world imparts a freshness to the descriptions which renders them more interesting than they might otherwise be; like Dick's point of view in the pottery factory chapter, Kate's perceptions lend the technical details a "human" interest which is not particularly characteristic of most naturalist novels.

The first direct confrontation between Kate's established, conventional way of life and the "loose" habits of the mummers occurs when the latter have a noisy after-theatre party in Dick's room and Kate goes to ask them to leave the house:

> As she descended the stairs she heard a man's voice screaming above the general hubbub:
>
> "I'll tell you what, if Miss Beaumont doesn't wait for my beat another night, I'll insist on a rehearsal being called. She took the concerted music in the finale of the first act two whole bars before her time. It was damned awful. I nearly broke my stick trying to stop her."
>
> "Quite true; I never saw the piece go so bad. Bret was 'fluffing' all over the shop."
>
> Kate listened vaguely to these fragments of conversation, and tremblingly asked herself how she was to walk in upon those people and tell them that they must keep quiet. . . . On [one] side of the round table sat Mr. Joe Mortimer, the

> heavy lead, the celebrated miser in the *Cloches*. A tall girl standing behind him playfully twisted his back-hair. He addressed paternal admonitions to her from time to time in an artificially cracked voice.
>
> "Please, sir," said Kate pleadingly, "I'm very sorry, but we cannot keep open house after eleven o'clock."
>
> A deep silence followed this announcement. Miss Leslie looked up at Kate curiously. Mr. Lennox stopped twisting the corkscrew into the bottle, and his big blue eyes beamed with amazement.
>
> Then the low comedian, seizing the opportunity, murmured in his mechanical voice to the girl behind him, "Open house! Of course, she's quite right. I knew there was a draught somewhere; I felt my hair blowing about."
>
> Everybody laughed, and the merriment contributed to still further discountenance the workwoman. (47-48)

Several elements are at work in this passage. The actors speak in their own jargon ("the concerted music," "finale," "fluffing") but this seems incidental to Kate's shocked disapproval and the general air of "good fun" that the actors are having. The reader is able both to sympathize with Kate—the incident is related from her point of view, and the word "tremblingly" underlines her timidity—and to enjoy the unmistakable liveliness and humour of the description.

Such duality in perception, in fact, exists in nearly all of the descriptions of the theatre milieu. This makes for a kind of objectivity which is very different from Zola's seemingly neutral reporting of squalid reality. Zola describes what he sees, with no editorial commentary; but what he "sees," as many critics have observed, constitutes its own commentary. It is impossible for the reader to see Nana as anything but debauched. By contrast, it is almost impossible to determine Moore's attitude, an overall "judgment," about the actors in *A Mummer's Wife*. Kate's middle-class sense of decorum is constantly at odds with the sheer vitality of the descriptions, as in the following passage in which Kate waits for Dick in the wings:

> Occasionally the voice of the prompter was heard, "Now then, ladies, silence if you please; I can't hear what's being said on the stage." But no one listened to him. Like animals in a fair, they continued to crush and to crowd in the passage, between the wings and the white-washed wall. A tall, fat girl stood close by; her hand was on her sword, which she slapped slowly against her thighs. Kate quailed beneath her glance, and shrank back disgusted. The odour of hair, cheap scent, necks, bosoms, and arms, was over-powering, and to Kate's sense of modesty there was something revolting in this loud display of body. But a bugle-call was soon sounded in the orchestra, and this was the signal for much noise and bustle. The conspirators rushed off the stage, threw aside their cloaks, and immediately after the soft curling strains of the waltz were heard; then the bugle was sounded again, and the girls began to tramp. (121)

Kate is "disgusted" and "revolted," and certainly the references to "animals in a fair," the "fat girl" slapping her sword against her thighs and the "odour of hair, cheap scent, necks, bosoms and arms" evoke a sense of crude vulgarity. But all of the action in the passage —the ignoring of the prompter, the crowding, the sounding of the bugle, the noise and bustle, the rushing off the stage, the throwing aside of cloaks and the tramping—creates an impression of excitement and professional exertion that seems perfectly normal. The "soft curling strains of the waltz" also detract from the crudity of the scene, so that the reader receives a dual impression, one of both animalism and a kind of energetic beauty. The result is certainly objective, in that the narratorial stance evinces neither approbation nor disgust; Zola's pessimistic view of reality is avoided, but without recourse to idealism. The naturalism is modified, in other words, but not excessively.

This same tension exists in many of the early descriptions of the actors. Kate's disapproval of many of their antics, such as "Mr. Simpson's lunch," their ramming of the hotel door and their amusements on the train ("The tenor, conductor, and second low comedian had spread a rug over their knees, and were playing Nap. They shouted, laughed, and sang portions of their evening music when they made or anticipated making points, and Kate was therefore left to herself, and she looked out of the window" [139]) mostly seem harmless enough, good-humoured and jolly, as do the actors themselves. Lovesick Montgomery, argumentative Dubois, tipsy Hayes, acid-witted Mortimer, handsome Bret, temperamental Beaumont, sweet-tempered Leslie and catty Dolly are well-drawn minor characters, all slightly eccentric but not malicious or "low" as many of Zola's characters are.

In this way, then, the reader becomes accustomed, along with Kate, to the milieu of the travelling theatre company. Her initial disapproving attitude gradually dissipates, so that by the time Kate herself goes on the stage the endless travelling, the stage jargon and the backstage melée seem no longer exotic but familiar:

> On the principle that we can scarcely be said to be moving when all around is moving in a like proportion, Kate learned to regard locality as a mere nothing, and to fix her centre of gravity in the forty human beings who were wandering with her, bound to her by the light ties of opera bouffe.
>
> Wherever she went her life remained the same. She saw the same faces, heard the same words. Were they likely to do good business? was debated when they alighted from the train;

> that they had or had not done good business was affirmed when they jumped into the train. Soon even the change of apartments ceased to astonish her, and she saw nothing surprising in the fact that her chest of drawers was one week on the right and the following on the left-hand side of her bed. Nor did she notice after two or three months of travelling whether wax flowers did or did not decorate the corners of her sitting-room, and it seemed to her of no moment whether the Venetian blinds were green or brown. (176)

In short, the theatrical milieu of *A Mummer's Wife* is full of carefully-researched material, but because of Moore's handling of this material the pervasive mood of this section of the novel, like that of the "potteries" section, does not seem particularly naturalistic. We have only to compare it to *Nana*, with its false glitter and prostitution, to see the difference; Moore depicts a much pleasanter "reality" than Zola does, even if his main character's story is not particularly pleasant. This was Henry James's objection to *Nana*, and indeed one of the general English objections to naturalism: "On what authority," asks James, "does M. Zola represent nature to us as a combination of the cesspool and the house of prostitution? On what authority does he represent foulness rather than fairness as the sign that we are to know her by?"[79] As I have shown, Moore "softens" his reality in *A Mummer's Wife* by humour (of which James says "the presence of it [in *Nana*], even in a limited degree would have operated, to some extent, as a disinfectant")[80] and by portraying his background material with vividness and vitality. The slice of life in Moore's novel is presented by a fairly dispassionate observer, but the observer sees both pleasant and unpleasant things, and records them all. To Moore's credit, the result is a more "ordinary" (and possibly more "realistic") view of reality than that which exists in most naturalistic novels, which tend to present a gloomy reality, or in most Victorian novels, which tend to present an idealistic one.

6. Style and Structure

"The finest qualities and meanest defects are mingled so curiously that one dares neither to bestow nor withhold from [Moore] the title of stylist,"[81] wrote Arnold Bennett of the style of *A Mummer's Wife*. Arthur Symons agreed, calling *A Mummer's Wife* a "masterpiece," yet saying of Moore that "he has never attained ease in writing, and he is capable of astounding incorrectnesses, the incorrectness of a man who knows better, who is not careless, and yet who cannot help himself."[82] Moore himself admitted that *A Mummer's Wife* was poorly written: "The book isn't written at all; you can't call a collection of sentences, or half-sentences, prose, any more than you can call the inhabitants of a hospital an effective regiment."[83] Certainly the early version of *A Mummer's Wife* contains some obvious awkwardnesses, most of which were much improved in the revised version. "It made her (Miss Hender) feel sick" (25), "Its psychological significance can be well and easily inferred from the following statement of the facts" (37) and "Her want of motherly instincts . . . were owing to the above-named causes" (264) are simply evidence of careless writing, about which one feels that Moore should have indeed "known better." There are also occasional tortuous metaphors, such as "The suspicion that had for months been gnawing at her heart, serpent-like, opened its jaws to suck her down into its monstrous gullet" (291). And another clumsiness of which Moore is sometimes guilty is the "colouring" of narrative passages with the characters' idiom, as when the narrator reports that Hender "did the amiable" (88), that Hayes was taken up "before the beak [judge]" (154), that Kate "clean forgot" (186) on which hand she wore her ring, that Kate and Dick sang with Montgomery "spanking away at the dominoes" (243), and that Kate, while "boozed" and fighting with Dick, "landed him one" (315) across the back. This latter "awkwardness" Moore may have unconsciously picked up from Zola who, as Brian Nicholas points out, appears to have deliberately "coloured" his narrative passages in this way.[84]

Aside from such obvious infelicities and several instances of laborious sentence structure, however, the prose of *A Mummer's Wife* is on the whole plain and unobtrusive. Madeleine Cazamian calls it "heavy and dull"[85] and John Freeman calls it "frigid and unexpressive,"[86] but, as Jean Noël observes, "cette simplicité sévère s'accorde bien avec la sobriété impitoyable avec laquelle faits et impressions sont présentés."[87] As I have shown, Moore sometimes uses figurative language, but sparingly. Forrest Reid argues that these poetic passages help to relieve the gloom of the tale, and that *A Mummer's Wife* is not as pessimistic as the same novel would be in French because "the darkest episodes . . . are now and then shot through by a sudden light of beauty."[88] This is true; even Kate's craving for drink is sometimes described in a "poetic" way, thereby lightening the gloom of the narrative as well as making her disease seem plausible:

> Without getting absolutely drunk, she rapidly sank into sensations of numbness, in which all distinctions were blurred, and thoughts trickled and slipped away like the soothing singing of a brook. It was like an amorous tickling, and as her dreams balanced between a tender declaration of love and the austere language of the Testament, the crying of the sick child was unheeded. (259)

Toward the end of the novel, as I have noted, such instances of figurative language (generally used to describe Kate's languorous reveries) become fewer and fewer, resulting in an increasing mode of "objective" factual reportage.

Like Zola, Moore was a friend and admirer of the impressionist painters. This is not surprising, as the avowed aim of both the naturalists and the impressionists was to portay nature as it appeared. In *Modern Painting* Moore defines impressionism as "the rapid noting of illusive appearance"; Zola in "Le Naturalisme au Salon" says that "one ought to seize nature in the impression of a moment."[89] Moore's early training as a painter made him especially fond of such descriptions and, as I have already pointed out, the opening chapters of *A Mummer's Wife* contain many impressionistic renderings of objects in various kinds of light, such as the stacks of crockery so lovingly described in the "pottery" episode. Another suitable subject for impressionistic descriptions is the bricks and furnaces of Hanley, and Moore makes good use of it. As Kate and Dick plan their elopement, for example, they watch the furnace fires appear on the hills around Hanley:

> Momentarily the spectacle grew more striking and magnificent. Furnace-fires flashed everywhere through the wide shadow-sea. For miles, on the right, on the left, they sprang into existence, and then remained fixed like stars in the purple concave of night. In the foreground—that is to say, in the heart of the valley—they were most numerous. There were there separate lights, groups, and constellations, and in lines they wandered over miles of country, becoming scarcer as they ascended the hidden slopes of the hills. Along the ridges they appeared like vessels passing about the horizon of a vast sea. On the left Northwood's sharp back was seen like the rough line of a rocky coast; on the right the lights of Southwark might have been mistaken for a fleet of fishing-boats riding at anchor in a dead calm. (127)

This is effective impressionistic description;[90] Moore manages to capture the various lights appearing in the darkness in one overall "impression." But the excessive multiplication of such scenes in the first third of *A Mummer's Wife* strikes the reader as simply self-indulgent and, after a time, monotonous. In addition, some of these scenes seem more like descriptions of paintings than descriptions of landscapes, or as the painter Steer put it, "based upon a picture rather than upon direct observation."[91] For instance, we read

> Through a drifting veil of smoke the sloping sides of the hills with all their fields could be seen sleeping under immense covertures of shadow, or basking naked upon beds of light. A deluge of rays fell upon them, defining every angle of Watley Rocks, and floating over the grasslands of Standon until all was lost in a huge embrasure filled with the almost imperceptible outlines of the Wever Hills. For, like a reversed teacup placed in a basin is the mound on which the red town of Hanley is built; and the intersecting lines, squares, and oblongs of the hill-fields render the likeness more apparent, representing as they do a pattern similar to the painted edging of a Staffordshire basin. (53)

"Defining every angle" and "the interesting lines, squares, and oblongs" seem more technical than visual, and not even the "reversed teacup placed in a basin" helps us to "see" the hills and field. Elsewhere, we are told that

> The brutal abruptness of the brickwork of the distant factories was a little blended, just as too hard a drawing is modulated by the passing of a neutral tint over it; and the deep harmonic measures of monochrome were broken nowhere, except by the black spire of Northwood church, which pierced the one band of purple that yet remained. (124)

This is even more markedly "technical." Such scenes in themselves do not constitute a flaw in the novel; it is their abundance that finally causes them to become monotonous and ineffective.

Perhaps one of the greatest influences of Zola's work on Moore was the structural influence. In his preface to *Pot-Bouille*, published the same year as *A Mummer's Wife*, Moore proclaims that Zola

> more than any other writer, it seems, possesses the power of seeing a subject as a whole, can divest it at will of all side issues, can seize with a firm, logical comprehension on the main lines of its construction, and that without losing sight of the remotest cause or the furthest consequences of its existence.[92]

Later, Arnold Bennett was to praise *A Mummer's Wife* enthusiastically in very similar terms:

> *A Mummer's Wife* is more than a masterpiece; it is one of the supreme novels of the century, a work which stands out, original, daring, severe, ruthless, and resplendent, even among the finest. It excels at all points. In the large masses of its form it is impeccable. It proceeds

> naturally and inevitably, without haste and without slur to a catastrophe from which there is no escape.[93]

Janet Egleson Dunleavy speaks of the vase-like symmetry of *A Mummer's Wife*[94]—ten chapters are devoted to each stage of Kate's life—but this is not the same thing as excellence in "the large masses of its form" and proceeding "naturally and inevitably" to its catastrophe. It is the novel's overall construction which Bennett admires. Brian Nicholas and Milton Chaikin also emphasize the novel's symmetry, however, suggesting that the wedding dinner, like the birthday dinner in *L'Assommoir*, marks the turning point in the fortunes of the main characters. This is not quite so, however. The atmosphere of the dinner episode, while it is not quite so sordid as that of Gervaise's debauch, displays a similar despondence; everyone eats and drinks too much, snide remarks are exchanged and, after the meal,

> A heavy digestive indifference to everything was written on each countenance; and in the slanting rays of the setting sun the curling smoke vapours assumed the bluest of tints. Odours of spirits trailed along the tablecloth. Disconnected fragments of conversation, heard against the uninterrupted murmur of Mortimer's story-telling voice, struck the ear. (227)

It is also true that the narrator informs us that "The date that marked the turning of the tide of prosperity that till now had favoured the 'Co.' was Kate's marriage" (230), but the incident that marks the turning point in Kate's own fortunes occurs before this, when she prepares to play Serpolette with the help of a couple of drinks:

> "What is a romp?" Kate asked herself; and she strove to realise in detail that which she had accepted till now in outline. The first thing to be done was to get rid of her gloom; and feeling angry like one who has started at a shadow, she went over to the cupboard, took out a decanter, and drank a couple of glasses of sherry. The stimulant had the desired effect. Gaily she skipped now from the graver scenes of her married life . . . to attune her thoughts to the sentiments of the three hours to be passed in the day of the footlights and the shadow of painted trees. (198)

This scene contains the seeds of all the troubles which eventually overtake Kate: her reluctant (and temporary) overcoming of her conventional sexual attitudes, and the use of alcohol as a source of strength and comfort. The narrator informs us that "The struggle was a hard one, but it was on this evening, more than on any other, that she freed herself from the weight of ten years of work which pressed upon her, and trod the heaviest tread on the head of her anterior life" (198), and this, it seems to me, rather than the wedding dinner, is the "turning point" in *A Mummer's Wife*.

There are some significant structural similarities between Zola's novel and Moore's, however, and they are to be found in the arrangement of the "large masses of its form" that Bennett praised. Moore particularly admired what he called Zola's "fugal method" and "the immense harmonic development of the idea." In *Confessions*, Moore gives what must be one of the best critical analyses ever written about the wash-house scene in *L'Assommoir*:

> I had read the "Assommoir," and had been much impressed by its pyramid size, strength, height, and decorative grandeur, and also by the immense harmonic development of the idea;

> and the fugal treatment of the different scenes had seemed to me astonishingly new—the washhouse, for example: the fight motive is indicated, then follows the development of side issues, then comes the fight motive explained; it is broken off short, it flutters through a web of progressive detail, the fight motive is again taken up, and now it is worked out in all its fulness; it is worked up to *crescendo*, another side issue is introduced, and again the theme is given forth. And I marvelled greatly at the lordly, river-like roll of the narrative, sometimes widening out into lakes and shallowing meres, but never stagnating in fen or marshlands. The language, too, . . . delighted me with its novelty, its richness, its force. Nor did I then even roughly suspect that the very qualities which set my admiration in a blaze wilder than wildfire . . . were very antagonistic to those claimed for the new art. . . .[95]

In admiring *L'Assommoir's* "pyramid size, strength, height, and decorative grandeur" and the "lordly, river-like roll of the narrative," Moore is in fact admiring Zola's aesthetic, rather than his naturalistic qualities; and, as Graham Hough points out, these are the very qualities Zola has now come to be admired for. Also, Moore's fascination with rhythm, the "immense harmonic development of the idea" was to persist through his allegiances to Turgenev ("the delicate rhythms . . . of his stories"),[96] Dostoevsky ("only by a skilful use of anti-climax may we attain those perfect climaxes"),[97] Pater ("getting his prose to flow to a murmurous melody, rising and disappearing like water mysteriously")[98] and Wagner ("thinking how a story might be woven from start to finish out of one set of ideas, each chapter rising out of the preceding chapter in suspended cadence, always, never a full close")[99] and was finally to culminate in the achievement of his own "melodic line" in narrative. "Rhythm and inevitableness," Moore came to believe, were "two words for one and the same thing."[100]

In the wash-house scene in *L'Assommoir*, the fight between Gervaise and Virginie builds to a climax within several pages. In *A Mummer's Wife*, the fights between Kate and Dick begin gradually, and increase in frequency and intensity over the last third of the novel until Dick finally leaves Kate. Their rhythmic, inexorable recurrence creates a nightmare quality which underlines Kate's desperation and Dick's relief when they finally separate. Sometimes these quarrels are rendered in vivid, violent detail, and sometimes they are only mentioned in passing ("Lately two fights, that had lasted respectively two and three days, had rendered the continuance of the sea-side tour impossible" [280-81]), but each one adds to the tension and the impression that a score is being followed which must be played to its conclusion. The reader soon realizes that the periods of relative calm between the quarrels are only temporary, each one a prelude to a battle more irrevocably damaging than the last. Like Gervaise's "rounds" with Virginie at the wash-house, but on a much larger scale, Kate's quarrels with Dick are an effective structural device. They are the thread that runs through the course of Kate's alcoholism, giving it both pattern and intensity; without them, the last third of the book would be a formless mass of sordid physical details. In this "fugal treatment" of the structure of the last part of *A Mummer's Wife*, we can see an aspect of Moore's later style in embryo. The endless weaving of theme upon theme that is characteristic of the melodic line surely had its origins here.

One of these scenes, in particular, is interesting for what it demonstrates about Moore's ability to vary the passing of fictional time in the novel. Essentially he does this by alternating between the particular (denoted by dialogue or the reporting of a specific action) and the general (denoted by "sometimes," the conditional tense or the reporting of time passing). The result is at once a sense of immediacy (we seem to witness the quarrel) and of condensation (long stretches of time seem to be compressed in the incident). The scene I have in mind is the one in which Kate overturns the soup-tureen into Dick's lap, burning him quite badly. The scene ends in the following manner:

> Kate . . . continued to rave forth incoherent statements of all kinds. In the meanwhile, the landlady came up to ask when she should bring up the leg of mutton, but she went away frightened. There was no dinner that day. Amid screams and violent words the evening died slowly, and the room darkened until nothing was seen but the fitful firelight playing on Dick's hands; but still, through the shadows, passed, like a figure of avenging fate, the vague form of the woman. Would she never grow tired and sit down? he asked himself a thousand times. It seemed as if it would never cease, and the incessant repetition of the same words and gestures turned in the brain with the mechanical movement of a wheel, dimming the sense of reality and producing the obtuse terror of a nightmare. But from this state of semi-consciousness he was suddenly awakened by the violent ringing of the bell, . . . "Yes, yes—do you hear me?" she screamed, advancing towards him, spilling as she did the glass of wine she held in her hand over her dress. "I shall have you locked up, and I should love to do so, because it was you who ruined me, who seduced me, and I hate you for it."
>
> She spoke with a fearful volubility, and her haranguing echoed in Dick's ears with the cruel meaningless sound of a water-tap heard splashing on the flagstones of an echoing courtyard.
>
> *Sometimes he would get up*, determined to make one more effort, and in his gentlest and most soothing tones would say:
>
> "Now look here, dear, will you listen to me? I know you well, and I know you are a bit excited; if you will believe me—"

> But it was no use. Apparently she did not hear him. Indeed, it almost seemed as if her ears had become stones. Her hands were clenched, and dragging herself away from him, *she would resume her tigerish walk*. . . . *Sometimes Dick wondered* at the strength that sustained her, and the thrill of joy that he experienced was intense, when about two o'clock, after eight or ten hours of the terrible punishment, he noticed that she seemed to be growing weary, that her cries were becoming less articulate. Several times she had stopped to rest; her head sank on her bosom, and every effort she made to rouse herself was feebler than the preceding one. At length her legs gave way under her, and she slipped insensible on the floor. (275-77, my italics)

The italicized passages, which represent general as opposed to particular time, give the effect of many hours passing, until finally the amount of fictional time which has actually passed ("eight or ten hours") is made explicit. This is clearly another foreshadowing of Moore's later style; in *The Brook Kerith*, for example, lifetimes pass quickly but with great vividness in this way. Such "telescoping" of fictional time marks one of the differences between the way in which Moore experimented with novel form and the way Joyce and other stream-of-consciousness novelists experimented with it. While *The Brook Kerith* condenses time in this way, *Ulysses* stretches it out, covering only one day in the lives of the characters. This device may not have been original with Moore, but he carried it farther than any other novelist of his day and handled it very skilfully, even as early as *A Mummer's Wife*.

This technique of interspersing the general with the particular is related to another device that is characteristic of the later Moore, the use of anecdote. The literary men who signed the letter to the *Times* on Moore's eightieth birthday were undoubtedly referring to his later style when they said that he had "taught narrative to flow again and anecdote to illumine it as the sun a stream."[101] Charles Morgan describes this anecdotal style as a method of "avoiding emphasis on major transitions by multiplying minor transitions,"[102] which is a good way of putting it. In *A Mummer's Wife* there are several colourful episodes which are connected only peripherally to the main narrative (such as the actors breaking down their landlord's door, and the ruse of "Mr. Simpson's lunch"), but these are generally much longer than mere anecdotes. The long digression in which Kate goes for a walk with Montgomery, for example, occupies almost a whole chapter. There is at least one instance, however, of the type of brief but effective anecdote woven into the main narrative that is one of the hallmarks of the "melodic line." It really comprises, as they usually do, an anecdote within an anecdote. Kate and Dick have been unable to find accommodation in Bacup where they are playing, but a rough carter invites them to spend the night at his house (the larger anecdote). The next morning at breakfast,

> Dick's appetite showed such signs of outdoing the carter's that Kate, for mere shame, in the hope of diverting attention, commenced an interesting conversation with the buxom maiden by her side, and so successful were her efforts at agreeability that a friendship was soon established between the women; and, when the morning's work was done, Mary, of her own accord, sought out Kate, and as she knitted the thick woollen stocking, was easily led into telling the inevitable love story.
>
> We change the surroundings, but a heart bleeds under all social variations; and in this grim manufacturing town the bridal dress seemed, when taken out of its lavender and

> darkness, to possess a gleam of poetic whiteness that it could not have had even if set off by the pleasant verdure of a Devonshire lane.
>
> "But you'll keep it for another; another will be sure to come by very soon," said Kate, trying to console.
>
> "Nay, nay, I'll have no other," said the girl. "I'll just keep the dress by; but I'll have no other."
>
> Then the conversation lapsed into a long narrative concerning tender hopes and illusions not broken through until the party assembled before the altar rails. Kate listened, as all women do, to the story of heart-aches and deceptions, and in after years, when all other remembrances of the black country were swept away, the souvenir of this white dress remained. (241-42)

This smaller anecdote is neither as vivid nor as polished as those of Moore's later style, having rather too much narrative comment ("We change the surroundings," et cetera), but its effect is similar. It is a momentary flash, so well integrated into the main narrative (which is continued in the next sentence, beginning "From Bacup they went to Whitworth. . . . ") that it is hardly recalled at the end of the novel. When such instances are multiplied, as they are in the later novels, the result is an astonishing richness of texture and sense of flow.

When Moore revised *A Mummer's Wife* in 1917, recasting it to conform to his later style, he removed the naturalistic "scaffolding" which he had left in place in the earlier version; much of the animal imagery, many of the impressionistic descriptions and almost all of the narratorial analyses are omitted. There is less figurative language, and the style is smoother and more unified. Apart from the change in Mrs. Forest from a merely crazy character to a romantic mystical one, who does not fit into the story at all, the result is a much better novel; I do not think that Anne King's contention that Moore's revisions spoiled the "freshness" of his earlier works applies to *A Mummer's Wife*.[103]

In his second novel, then, Moore followed fairly closely Zola's formula for the creation of a naturalistic novel. He carefully researched and reported the milieux of his novel, including the unpleasant physical details, he adopted a straightforward attitude toward sex, he did not "individualize" his characters too much, and he recorded, as objectively as he could, the effects of a certain kind of environment on a certain kind of inherited temperament. Although some early reviewers saw the novel as a "warning" against the evils of alcohol, there is no obvious "moral" to the tale; as Nejdefors-Frisk remarks, "Kate's behaviour is neither praised nor blamed by the author, and there are no moral conclusions."[104] In his objectivity, in fact, Moore in some respects even outdoes Zola in this book. The straight-laced middle-class world and the carefree bohemian world are both seen to have both desirable and undesirable qualities; neither one is right or wrong, they are simply different. Moore had every reason to be disappointed when Zola refused to write the preface for the French edition of *A Mummer's Wife*.

For all of that, the novel is an individual creation, and not merely a French "copy." Its naturalism, while pronounced, is "softened" slightly; the atmosphere is not so gloomy, the narrator not so reticent, nor the characters so debased as they are in most of Zola's novels, for example. Kate Ede is a "type" rather than an individual; but she is an English type, and *A Mummer's Wife* is a unique creation, an English novel written to French naturalistic specifications. Moore never wrote anything else like *A Mummer's Wife*—Douglas Hughes calls it "his only Zolaesque novel"[105]—but it marked the beginning of a very important strain of realism that runs through all his best work. In the last analysis, naturalism itself was not important for Moore, as he believed that "The great literary battle of our day is not to be fought for either realism or romanticism, but for freedom of speech";[106] but if the first infusion of naturalism into the English novel could be pinpointed, it could be said to occur here. This is by no means an insignificant event in the history and development of English fiction, and to students of Moore and students of late Victorian literature, *A Mummer's Wife* presents a fascinating study. And, even apart from its historical importance, as I have endeavoured to show, *A Mummer's Wife* is on its own merits a very good novel.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Quoted in Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 373.

[2] "*A Mummer's Wife*," *Athenaeum*, LXXXIV (Dec. 13, 1883), 767.

[3] "*A Mummer's Wife*," *Saturday Review*, LIX (Feb. 14, 1885), 214.

[4] Morgan, *Epitaph on George Moore*, p. 16.

[5] Wilde satirized the three-volume novel in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)—Miss Prism says, "Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days. . . . The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means," and Lady Bracknell refers to it as "a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality"—and Kipling commemorated the passing of the "Three Decker" in a poem by that name in 1896:

"We asked no social questions—we pumped no hidden shame—
We never talked obstetrics when the little stranger came;
We left the Lord in Heaven, we left the fiends in Hell,
We weren't exactly Yussefs, but—Zuleika didn't tell!

No moral doubt assailed us, so when the port we neared,
The villain got his flogging at the gangway, and we cheered.
'Twas fiddles on the foc'sle—'twas garlands on the mast,
For everyone got married, and I went ashore at last.

I left 'em all in couples akissing on the decks.
I left the lovers loving and the parents signing checks.
In endless English comfort by country-folk caressed,
I left the old three-decker at the Islands of the Blest. . . ."

[6] George Moore, *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals* (London: Vizetelly, 1885), pp. 18-19, 21.

[7] Thackeray, "Preface," *The History of Pendennis* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1850), p. viii.

[8] Henry James, "Nana," *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 241.

[9] Walter Miller, "Foreword," *A Mummer's Wife* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1966), p. v.

[10] Milton Chaikin refers to *A Mummer's Wife* as "the first naturalistic novel in English fiction," and also as "the first and last naturalistic novel [Moore] wrote" ("George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, pp. 31, 39); Enid Starkie calls it "the first completely Naturalistic novel in English" ("George Moore and French Naturalism," *The Man of Wax*, p. 66); and Walter Allen calls Moore "the only English Naturalist in the French sense" *(The English Novel*, p. 298).

[11] Quoted in Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 101.

[12] Quoted in George Moore, *Avowals* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), p. 185.

[13] Stuart P. Sherman, *On Contemporary Literature* (New York: Henry Holt, 1917), p. 134.

[14] Chaikin, "George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 30.

[15] Douglas Hughes, "Introduction," *The Man of Wax*, p. xi.

[16] Émile Zola, "The Novel," *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, p. 211.

[17] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 101.

[18] Miller, "Foreword," *A Mummer's Wife*, p. vii.

[19] William Newton, "Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists," *Philological Quarterly*, XXX, 1 (April 1951), 165.

[20] Hughes, "Introduction," *The Man of Wax*, p. xii.

[21] C. Heywood, "Flaubert, Miss Braddon, and George Moore," *Comparative Literature*, XII (Spring 1960), 151.

[22] *Ibid.*, 157.

[23] Moore, *Avowals*, p. 128.

[24] George Moore, *A Mummer's Wife* (London: Walter Scott, 1893), p. 38. All subsequent references to *A Mummer's Wife* in the text are to this edition, which is a reprint of the 1886 Vizetelly edition (Moore's first revision of the novel).

[25] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1864), II, 226. All subsequent references to *The Doctor's Wife* in the text are to this edition.

[26] Matthew Josephson, *Zola and his Time* (Garden City: Garden City Publishing, 1928), p. 92.

[27] De Goncourt, "Preface," *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. v.

[28] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard Trask (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), p. 447.

[29] Granville Hicks, *Figures of Transition* (New York: MacMillan, 1939), p. 205.

[30] Henry James, "Style and Morality in *Madame Bovary*," *Madame Bovary: Backgrounds and Sources, Essays in Criticism*, ed. and trans. Paul de Man (W. W. Norton, 1965), p. 347.

[31] Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 41. Peter Ure agrees that Kate is motivated not by passion, but by "slack-bodied" sentimentality. Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 92.

[32] Quoted in Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, pp. 6-7 (omitted from published text).

[33] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 154.

[34] Flaubert in a letter to Louis Bonenfant, Dec. 12, 156, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1926-33), IV, 136, quoted in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 94.

[35] "*A Mummer's Wife*," 215.

[36] Lilian R. Furst, "George Moore, Zola, and the Question of Influence," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, I, 2 (Spring 1974), 140.

[37] Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel*, p. 92.

[38] Osbert Burdett, "George Moore," *London Mercury*, XXVII (March 1933), 419.

[39] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 93.

[40] Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1864), p. 44. "In the priest who listens to her, and whose voice comes softly to her, the woman of toil and pain sees not so much the minister of God . . . as the confidant of her sorrows and the friend of her miseries"(*Germinie Lacerteux*, trans., p. 50).

[41] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, pp. 106-07.

[42] George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1893), I, 246.

[43] Havelock Ellis in his article on Zola ("Zola: The Man and his Work," *Savoy*, 1 [Jan. 1896], 70) described leitmotif in the following way: "It is more than the tricky repetion of a word or gesture, overdone by Dickens and others; it is the artful manipulation of a carefully-elaborated, significant phrase. Zola seems to be the first who has, deliberately and systematically, introduced this sort of *leit-motiv* into literature as a method of summarizing a complex mass of details, ~~and~~ bringing the impression of them before the reader. . . . He sometimes attains poignantly simple effects by the mere repetition of a *leit-motiv* at the right moment." Ellis suggests that the yell of the Parisian mob ("À Berlin!") at the close of *Nana* is such a leitmotif. Moore, who likely became aware of this device partly through Zola's novels and partly through Wagner's operas, uses it in *A Mummer's Wife* with consummate skill. Kate sings "Look at me here" for the first time at her debut, and the adorable shyness with which she sings it is what makes her a success. Later, she sings it for a crowd of "roughs" in a filthy street where she is having a drunken quarrel with Dick; and finally, we see her in her dying drunken delirium confusing it with the hymn tunes of her childhood. Mentioned at these intervals, the song symbolizes all of Kate's difficulties and their causes: the adorable shyness is really shame, which causes her to become what she fears—a loose, dissipated woman who is looked down upon by everyone. And the hymn tunes and the religion they stand for are the cause of her shame, so that the irony of their final mingling in Kate's drunken mind is complete.

[44] Flaubert in a letter to Mlle. Leroyer de Chantpie, March 18, 1857, *Oeuvres Complètes, Correspondance*, IV, 164.

[45] Émile Zola, "Naturalism on the Stage," *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, p. 126.

[46] Noël, *George Moore*, pp. 105, 111.

[47] Emile Zola, "Preface," *Thérèse Raquin*, p. 22.

[48] *Ibid*, p. 22. See Chaikin, "George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 30.

[49] Frederick W. Seinfelt, *George Moore: Ireland's Unconventional Realist* (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1975), pp. 171-72.

[50] Moore, *Avowals*, p. 187.

[51] Moore made a similar naive blunder in his early enthusiasm for the idea of a "musical" novel. *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa*. his attempts to write "Wagnerian" novels, were simply novels about a heroine who sings Wagner, rather than attempts to write musical prose. Moore himself later realized this; in "The Nineness in the Oneness" (*Century Magazine*, XCIX [Nov. 1919], 66) he confesses that "In 'Evelyn Innes' and 'Sister Teresa,' there are references to many different kinds of music, for the opera-singer's father is an organist in a church that gathers large crowds to hear the sixteenth-century contrapuntalists. . . . But descriptions of madrigals and operas cannot be accepted as proof that the author's style was modified by musical interests. 'Evelyn Innes' is externally musical . . ."

[52] Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel*, p. 93.

[53] David Christie Murray, *My Contemporaries in Fiction* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1897), p. 92.

[54] Peter Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 100.

[55] Zola, "The Experimental Novel," *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, p. 25.

[56] Charles Baudelaire, "*Madame Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert," *L'artiste*, Oct. 8, 1857, reprinted in *Madame Bovary*, ed. Paul de Man, p. 341.

[57] James, "Style and Morality in *Madame Bovary*," *Ibid*., p. 347.

[58] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 445.

[59] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 94.

[60] Sherman, *On Contemporary Literature*, p. 135.

[61] Phyllis Harris Duckworth, "Naturalism and Romanticism in the Novels of George Moore," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tennessee, 1972, pp. 81-82.

[62] Heywood, "Flaubert, Miss Braddon, and George Moore," 158.

[63] Brian Nicholas, "The Novel as Social Document: *L'Assommoir* (1887)," *The Moral and the Story*, ed. Ian Gregor and Brian Nicholas (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), pp. 77, 83.

[64] L. W. Tancock, "Introduction," *Thérèse Racquin*, pp. 17-18.

[65] De Goncourt, *Germinie Lacerteux*, p. 194, "I am unfortunate: I have no luck, Nothing succeeds with me" (*Germinie Lacerteux*, trans., p. 194).

[66] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 106.

[67] Louis Cons, Review of *L'influence du naturalisme francais sur les romanciers angalis, Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XXVII (Oct. 1928) 573.

[68] George Moore, *Hail and Farewell*, ed. Richard Cave (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1976), p. 275.

[69] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 112.

[70] Furst and Skrine, *Naturalism*, p. 52.

[71] Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir, Les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1961), II, 426. "[Lorilleux] twined the wire prepared by his wife round a mandrel, a very thin steel rod. Then he drew the saw lightly along, cutting the wire along the whole length of the mandrel, each ring forming a curb. Then he welded them together. The curbs were laid on a large piece of charcoal. He moistened them with a drop of borax, which he took from the bottom of a broken glass by his side, and rapidly reddened them at the lamp, under the horizontal flame of the chimney. Then, when he had a hundred curbs, he returned to his delicate work, leaning over on the plug, a little piece of thin board which his hands had made quite shiny. He twisted loop after loop with the pincers, pressed it on one side, brought it through the loop above it, already in its place, re-opened it with the assistance of a pointed tool; and it was all done with an unintermittent regularity, curb succeeding curb with such rapidity that the chain began to lengthen out slowly under the very eyes of Gervaise, without her quite understanding how it was done"(*L'Assommoir*, trans. Arthur Symons [New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924], p. 57).

[72] Émile Zola, "Le Naturalisme au Salon," *Le Voltaire*, juin 18-22, 1880, reprinted as "Naturalism in the Salon" in Roland N. Stromberg, ed., *Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism: Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, 1848-1914* (New York: Walker, 1968), pp. 154-62. In an apparent contradiction to Zola, Arthur Symons in his article on "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (*Harper's New*

Monthly Magazine, LXXXVII, 522 [Nov. 1893], 858-59) asserts that "both Impressionism and Symbolism convey some notion of that new kind of literature which is perhaps more broadly characterized by the word Decadence. . . . What both seek is not general truth merely, but *la vérité vraie*, the very essence of truth—the truth of appearances to the senses, of the visible world to the eyes that see it; and the truth of spiritual things to the spiritual vision." This apparent discrepancy—the naturalists and the symbolists both claiming impressionism as belonging to their school—throws into relief some of the ambiguities surrounding the use of the term "impressionist" as it is applied to literature. Certainly the naturalists, as well as the symbolists, were concerned with the truth of "the visible world," and thus impressionistic painting seems equally suited to both movements. What Symons means by impressionism in literature, however, is quite different: "It was Goncourt who was the first to invent a style in prose really new, impressionistic, *a style which was itself almost sensation*. It is Verlaine who has invented such another new style in verse" (my italics). In this sense, of course, Moore's and Zola's scenes describing the play of light on objects are not "impressionistic" at all.

[73] Stromberg, ed., *Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism*, p. 155.

[74] Miller, "Foreword," *A Mummer's Wife*, pp. vii-viii.

[75] There is little doubt that Moore "borrowed" this scene from Zola. Here is Zola's description: "Tous les spectateurs parlaient, se poussaient, se casaïent, dans l'assaut donné aux places; et la bousculade des couloirs était si rude, que chaque porte lâchait péniblement un flot de monde, intarissable. C'étaient des signes d'appel, des froissements d'étoffe, un défilé de jupes et de coiffures, coupées par le noir d'un habit ou d'une redingote. Pourtant, les rangées de fauteuils s'emplissaient peu à peu; une toilette claire se détachait, une tête au fin profil baissait son chignon, òu courait l'éclair du bijou. Dans une loge, un coin d'épaule nue avait une blancheur de soie" (*Nana, Les Rougon-Macquart* [Paris: Fasquelle, 1961], II, 1102). "All the spectators were talking, jostling, settling themselves in a general assault upon seats; and the hustling rush in the side-passages was now so violent that every door into the house was laboriously admitting an inexhaustible flood of people. There were signals, rustlings of fabrics, a continual march-past of skirts and head-dresses, accentuated by the black hue of a dress-coat or a surtout. Notwithstanding this, the rows of seats were little by little getting filled up, while here and here a light toilette stood out from its surroundings, a head with a delicate profile bent forward under its chignon, where flashed the lightning of a jewel. In one of the boxes the tip of a bare shoulder glimmered like snowy silk" (*Nana* [New York: The Modern Library, 1928], pp. 10-11). And here is

Moore's: "Kate and Miss Hender gazed into the night of the pit, which extended to the line of the orchestra. Through this huge space an agitated roll progressed in one direction, and a darkness similar to that seen at sea slumbered over the heads of the people. These could not readily be distinguished, but a bald head or a bunch of yellow flowers in a woman's bonnet appeared for an instant like the crest of a wave. Overhead the darkness was still more sombre; a dozen pale jets of a miserable iron gas-fixing hanging out of the tenebrous shadows of the roof struggled in the middle gloom, leaving the outlines of the muses that decorated the cone of this warehouse-looking theatre as undefinable as the silhouettes of the shopkeepers in the pit" (106). The similarities are unmistakable: the moving mass of people, the general hubbub and the momentary highlighting of various objects in the darkness are common to both descriptions.

[76] Anthony Farrow, *George Moore* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 47.

[77] Hughes, "Introduction," *The Man of Wax*, p. ix.

[78] Martin Turnell, *The Art of French Fiction* (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 156.

[79] Henry James, *"Nana," The Parisian*, Feb. 26, 1880, reprinted in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 239.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

[81] Arnold Bennett, *Fame and Fiction* (Plainview: Books for Libraries Press, 1901), p. 259.

[82] Arthur Symons, "Impressions and Opinions," *Academy*, XXXIX (March 21, 1891), 274.

[83] Quoted in John Freeman, *A Portrait of George Moore in a Study of His Work* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1922), p. 71.

[84] See Brian Nicholas, "The Novel as Social Document: *L'Assommoir," The Moral and the Story*, pp. 63-97. He describes this "colouring" of the narrator's speech as a change in narrative stance from "serious and objective" to "a certain moral nonchalance," so that "the narrative form actually illustrates the proposition that the relative judgment is the only meaningful one" (p. 76). While this seems to be an accurate and satisfying description of the narrator's stance, many of Nicholas's examples are examples of free indirect speech rather than narration, such as the following: "Les parents avaient dû s'y accoutumer. Les roulées n'y faisaient rien. Ils la trépignaient, ce qui ne l'empêchait pas de prendre leur chez-eux comme une auberge, où l'on couchait à la

semaine. Elle savait qu'elle payait son lit d'une danse, elle venait recevoir la danse, s'il y avait bénéfice pour elle. D'ailleurs, on se lasse de taper. . . . Elle rentrait, ne rentrait pas, pourvu qu'elle ne laissât pas la porte ouverte, ça suffisait. Mon Dieu! l'habitude use l'honnêteté comme autre chose." ("Her parents had had to get used to it. The hidings she got made no difference to her. They gave her a good drubbing, but that did not prevent her from making use of their lodgings as a sort of inn, where one could put up by the week. She knew that she would have to pay for her bed by a thrashing, and she came and took her thrashing, when there was anything to be gained by it. And then, you get tired of dealing blows. . . . She came or she didn't come in; as long as she didn't leave the door open it was all right. Good heavens, decency, like anything else, wears out in time" [p. 75]). In fact, without mentioning free indirect speech directly, Nicholas realizes that "ultimately, in certain key passages, it becomes difficult to distinguish the character's reactions from the comments of the observer" (82). Roy Pascal regards this confusion as an "abuse" of free indirect speech by Zola, and also criticizes Flaubert for the "temporary supplanting of the character's perspective by the narratorial" (*The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977], p. 108). As Brian McHale points out, this "contamination" can work both ways: the narrator's speech may be "coloured" by the characters' idiom and vice-versa ("Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts," *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 3 [1978], 249-87). This idea, of course, can only be applied to the pre-stream-of-consciousness novel in which the narrator, no matter how "low a profile" he keeps, remains distinct from his characters; for, as Pascal recognizes, "with Joyce and many other authors free indirect speech . . . often emancipates itself from the subordinate position of indirect speech and becomes identical grammatically with pure, objective, narratorial style" (*The Dual Voice*, p. 108). Such novels seem to be couched entirely in the characters' idiom.

[85] Madeleine Cazamian, *Le Roman et les idées en Angleterre: l'intellectualisme et l'esthétisme (1880-1900)* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1935).

[86] Freeman, *A Portrait of George Moore in a Study of His Work*, p. 75.

[87] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 110.

[88] Forrest Reid, "The Novels of George Moore," *Westminster Review*, CLXXII (Aug. 1909), 205.

[89] Zola, "Naturalism in the Salon," *Realism, Naturalism and Symbolism*, p. 156.

[90] I am using "impressionistic" here in the painterly, as opposed to the literary sense; see note 17.

[91] Quoted by Gilbert Phelps, *The Russian Novel in English Fiction* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1956), p. 101.

[92] Quoted in Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 67.

[93] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, pp. 257-58.

[94] Janet Egleson Dunleavy, *George Moore: The Artist's Vision, The Storyteller's Art* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973), p. 68.

[95] Moore, *Confessions*, pp. 96-97.

[96] George Moore, *A Story-Teller's Holiday* (New York: privately printed, 1918), p. 330.

[97] Moore, "Preface," *Poor Folk*, p. xvi.

[98] Moore, *Avowals*, p. 198.

[99] Moore, "The Nineness in the Oneness," 65.

[100] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 162.

[101] "To George Moore on his Eightieth Birthday," *The Times*, Feb. 24, 1932.

[102] Morgan, *Epitaph on George Moore*, p. 48.

[103] See Anne Elizabeth Mills King, "Some Aspects of Style in the Fiction of George Moore: Naturalist, Irishman, Melodist," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Maryland, 1972.

[104] Sonja Nejdefors-Frisk, *George Moore's Naturalistic Prose* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1952), p. 83.

[105] Hughes, "Introduction," *The Man of Wax*, p. xi.

[106] Moore, Preface to *Pot-Bouille*, quoted in Noël, *George Moore*, p. 117.

CHAPTER III

A DRAMA IN MUSLIN

I remember one day very well. I was in High Street, Kensington. I saw girls walking by themselves; girls carrying music, novels, painting materials, manuscripts, passed me; they were talking eagerly. It was easy to see that they were proposing and planning new schemes of pleasure and work. . . . What girl-life! What a girl-country! Thought I. . . . What a novel there is to be written,—a real girl-novel!

George Moore, "*Defensio Pro Scriptis Meis*," 1887.[1]

1. Influences

Moore conceived his third novel, *A Drama in Muslin* (1885) while he was still writing *A Mummer's Wife*. "I continued to plod through 'Kate Lennon's Drunkenness,'" he tells us, "thinking from time to time of my girl-book."[2] Critics of the time reacted sharply to this "girl-book": the writer for the *Saturday Review* complained that Moore displayed "the thoughts and feelings of young women and their conversation when no men are present," suggesting that "George Moore" was not a man,[3] and the *Academy* described *A Drama in Muslin* with distaste as "realism of the . . . decolletage order. . . . It is full of . . . coarse scandal and girls' bedroom talk. . . ."[4] Several years later Arnold Bennett, on the other hand, called the novel "a gallery of unsurpassed portraits of women."[5]

Apart from such cursory contemporary criticism, however, *A Drama in Muslin* remains what Norman Jeffares calls an "unreasonably neglected novel."[6] Very little critical attention has been paid to it, possibly because it was so unlike anything else Moore ever wrote. This lack of critical commentary is amply compensated for, however, by the fact that Moore himself wrote more about his artistic intentions in this novel than in any other. In "*Defensio Pro Scriptis Meis*," to which I will refer at length in this chapter, Moore says, "True it is that Edgar Poe, in the 'Philosophy of Composition,' tells us how he conceived and constructed the poem of 'The Raven'; but in this paper I hope to do not only this for my novel, 'A Drama in Muslin,' but to tell with the uttermost frankness how and where it seems to me that I failed, how and where it seems to me that I succeeded."[7] In addition to this extraordinary essay, written the year after *A Drama in Muslin* was published, we have the benefit of yet another analysis and reassessment of the novel by Moore, this time written thirty-one years later, in the Preface to *Muslin* (the 1917 revision).

Aside from Jeffares' article on the "Irishness" of *A Drama in Muslin*, which has been converted into the Preface for the 1981 Norton edition and which deals primarily with the sub-plot of the book rather than its main plot, existing criticism has been concerned with tracing the "influences" on the novel. These have included such diverse proposed sources as Balzac, Flaubert, Huysmans, Zola and Jane Austen, with varying degrees of credibility. That there is a multiplicity of "styles" in the novel seems undisputed. Joseph Hone refers to "the style—or rather styles—of *A Drama in Muslin*";[8] W. C. Frierson remarks that "I doubt that Moore realised the violence he was doing to his own nature. He was trying to be popular and to write naturalistic novels and to imitate Jane Austen all at the same time";[9] and Moore himself sees the novel as "a link between two styles."[10] I would like to examine the suggested "influences" at the outset, in order to sort the likely from the unlikely, the important from the unimportant, the "borrowings" from the original. I will then go on to demonstrate what I believe to be the most noteworthy—and somewhat astonishing—feature of *A Drama in Muslin*, its close adherence to the traditional form of the Victorian novel. This conformity to English fictional norms is astonishing for two reasons: first, because *A Drama in Muslin* was also simultaneously inspired by French symbolist techniques, an unlikely combination, and second, because Moore had always vigorously denigrated the Victorian novel. *A Drama in Muslin* is in fact unique in Moore's career, as it is the closest any of his novels come to fitting in with the established English mode of his day.

Some of the suggested "influences" on this remarkable novel are significant; others are less so. Critics who see *A Drama in Muslin* as "Balzacian," for example, generally use the term merely in reference to the novel's subject matter. Milton Chaikin sees the story of the Irish aristocracy as similar to "Balzac's rationale of small town life in France" in its four prevalent traits: "its narrowness, its rivalries, its avarice, and (because of the dearth of marital opportunities) its celibacy," and sees a parallel between Alice's dread of spinsterhood and that of Mlle. Cormon in Balzac's *Une Vieille Fille* (1836).[11] Malcolm Brown, on the other hand, speaks of the "Balzacian mode" of *A Drama in Muslin* exclusively in terms of avarice, "the urge to get money or to keep money."[12] Such considerations are superficial, at best—surely not every novel to do with small town life or avarice can be dubbed "Balzacian"—and fail to address the issue of style at all.

Chaikin also sees the novel as derivative from Zola's *Pot-Bouille* (in its theme of the pursuit of husbands), but this, too, is a fairly superficial observation. It is true that Moore wrote the Preface for the English edition of Zola's novel in 1885; it is also true that Zola's dramatic situation of the mother trying to wed her two marriageable daughters parallels Moore's, but there the similarity (which is merely thematic) ends. The obsessive lasciviousness of the characters in *Pot-Bouille* is nowhere to be found in *A Drama in Muslin*, nor does the preoccupation with Alice's inner consciousness, which is essential to the structure of Moore's novel, have any counterpart in Zola's. Chaikin is vague in his reference to Moore's use of "Zola's 'symphonies' of materials, character tags, crowd scenes, use of odours, light effects, pictorial effects, and other literary habits"[13] in *A Drama in Muslin*, and his categorization of "the prose poems that fill the volume . . . involving synesthesia and symbolism" as "Zolaesque" is simply inaccurate, as I shall show.

Apart from these relatively facile observations about Moore's sources, critics generally single out two passages in particular, obviously "borrowed," which allegedly provide proof of the derivative nature of *A Drama in Muslin*. The first of these is the dual conversation carried on simultaneously between Mr. Barton and the Land League (outside the drawing room) and between Mrs. Barton and Captain Hibbert (inside the drawing room) in Chapter 7. It has been pointed out (by Sonja Nejdefors-Frisk, Walter Ferguson, and Joseph Hone, among others)[14] that this device is identical to that used by Flaubert in Chapter 8, Part II of *Madame Bovary* to record the speech of the agriculturalists in the street and of Emma and Rodolphe in the room above. In Flaubert's famous scene, the various councillors declaim on various agricultural subjects while Rodolphe verbally seduces Emma. The latter conversation, which is integral to the novel's plot, is thus interlarded with the agricultural comments on flax, cheeses and cattle, which are entirely incidental to the plot. The two discourses are reported alternately, in both direct and indirect speech, for several pages until they climax in the following spate of stichomythic dialogue:

> Et il saisit sa main; elle ne la retira pas.
>
> "Ensemble de bonnes cultures!" cria le président.
>
> —Tantôt, par exemple, quande je suis venu chez vous. . .
>
> "A M. Bizet, de Quincampoix."
>
> —Savais-je que je vous accompagnerais?
>
> "Soixante et dix francs!"
>
> —Cent fois même j'ai voulu partir, et je vous ai suivie, je suis resté.
>
> "Fumiers."
>
> —Comme je resterais ce soir, demain, les autres jours, toute ma vie!
>
> "A M. Caron, d'Argueil, une médaille d'or!"
>
> —Car jamais je n'ai trouvé dans la société de personne un charme aussi complet.
>
> " A M. Bain, de Givry-Saint-Martin!"
>
> —Aussi, moi, j'emporterai votre souvenir.
>
> "Pour un bélier mérinos. . ."
>
> —Mais vous m'oublierez, j'aurai passé comme une ombre.
>
> "A M. Belot, de Notre-Dame . . . "
>
> —Oh! non, n'est-ce pas, je serai quelque chose dans votre pensée, dans votre vie?
>
> "Race porcine, prix *ex aequo*: à MM. Lehérissé et Cullembourg; soixante francs!"[15]

Such juxtaposition (of money, manure, rams and hogs with Rodolphe's protestations of love) obviously constitutes an effective sardonic commentary by the narrator on the shallow, purely physical nature of Emma's and Rodolphe's attraction for each other.

In Moore's scene, too, the juxtaposition of the two conversations underlines the irony of the situation. Both inside and outside the drawing-room, bargains are being struck between unequally-matched parties: Mr. Barton has more bargaining power, however tenuous, than his tenants, and Mrs. Barton has the power to refuse Captain Hibbert her permission to marry Olive. In this scene, as at several other points in the novel (such as the scene in which the Irish peasants gape at the girls in their finery on their way to the Castle ball), the main plot and the sub-plot are thrown into sharp relief against each other, and the connection between the two is made explicit. Mrs. Barton's consciousness is the only one that is reported in the scene, but it is tellingly effective:

> From the drawing-room window Mrs. Barton watched, her little selfish soul racked with dividual doubt. On one side she saw her daughter's beautiful white face becoming the prize of a penniless officer; on the other she saw the pretty furniture, the luxurious idleness, the very silk dress on her back, being torn from them, and distributed among a crowd of Irish-speaking, pig-keeping peasants. (127)

In fact, she uses the tenants' conversation as a (fairly plausible) explanation to Captain Hibbert of her own bargaining position:

> She could see that some new and important point was being argued; and it was with a wrench she detached her thoughts from the pantomime that was being enacted within her view, and, turning to Captain Hibbert, said:
>
> "You see what is happening; we are, that is to say, we may be, ruined at any moment by this wicked agitation. As I have said before, there is no one I should like so much as yourself; but, in the face of such a future, how could I consent to give you my daughter?—that is to say, I could not unless you could settle at least a thousand a year upon her." (127)

As in Flaubert's scene, the two conversations continue to alternate throughout the scene, which ends with the following exchanges:

> "Thin it is decided yer pay at twinty-foive per cint," said Mr. Scully.
> "Then, Captain Hibbert," said Mrs. Barton a little sternly, "I am very sorry indeed that we can't agree, but, after what has passed between us today, I do not think you will be justified in again trying to see my daughter."
> "Begad, sor, they were all aginst me for agraying to take the twinty-foive," whispered the well-to-do tenant who was talking to the agent.
> "I fail to understand," said Captain Hibbert, haughtily, "that Miss Barton said anything that would lead me to suppose that she wished me to give her up. However, I do not see that anything would be gained by discussing this matter further—good morning, Mrs. Barton."
> "Good morning, Captain Hibbert," and Mrs. Barton smiled winningly as she rang the bell for the servant to show him out. When she returned to the window the tenants were following Mr. Scully into the rent-office, and, with a feeling of real satisfaction she murmured to herself—
> "Well, after all, nothing ever turns out as badly as we expect it." (130)

Each negotiation ends simply because one of the parties involved has no real bargaining power; each negotiation has been an elaborate sham. Moore ends his scene (which also ends the chapter) without narrative commentary and without Flaubert's ironic humour. The result is a more natural and convincing interweaving of plot and sub-plot; Flaubert's perfectly dovetailed sentence fragments are obviously artificial by comparison. Moore not only borrowed Flaubert's device, but improved upon it. Moore himself, who openly admitted the borrowing, was justifiably disappointed that critics had failed to notice the improvements:

> In "Madame Bovary" Flaubert has interwoven part of the Mayor's speech with Rodolph's and Emma's love-making. I have gone further than this. I have interwoven two important scenes entirely dissimilar, and yet each dependent on the other; scenes in which several interests are involved, and in which there are at least six speaking characters; and to increase the illusion I have sometimes made the conversation of one set of characters cross with that of the other. These are the points I should have called attention to had I reviewed the book when it appeared. . . .[16]

Isolated parallel passages do not go far in proving influences, however. The single instance of simultaneous conversations does not make the whole of *A Drama in Muslin* "Flaubertian," any more than does the fact, pointed out by Walter Ferguson, that both Alice and Emma marry doctors and have blue carriage cushions (!)[17]

Another parallel frequently singled out by critics is that between the "dress material" passage in *A Drama in Muslin* and the description of Des Esseintes' "orgue à bouche" in Huysman's *À Rebours*. Here is Huysmans' passage:

> Du reste, chaque liquer correspondait, selon lui, comme goût, au son d'un instrument. Le curaçao sec, par exemple, à la clarinette dont le chant est aigrelet et volouté; le kummel au hautbois dont le timbre sonore nasille; la menthe et l'anisette, à la flûte, tout à la fois sucrée et poivrée, piaulante et douce; tandis que, pour compléter l'orchestre, le kirsch sonne furieusement de la trompette; le gin et le whisky emportent le palais avec leurs stridents éclats de pistons et de trombones, l'eau-de-vie de marc fulmine avec les assourdissants vacarmes des tubas, pendant que roulent les coups de tonnere de la cymbale et de la caisse frappés à tour de bras, dans la peau de la bouche, par les rakis de Chic et les mastics!
>
> Il pensait aussi que l'assimilation pouvait s'étendre, que des quatuors d'instruments à cordes pouvaient

> fonctionner sous la voûte palatine, avec le violon représentant la vieille eau-de-vie, fumeuse et fine, aiguë et frêle; avec l'alto simulé par le rhum plus robuste, plus ronflant, plus sourd: avec le vespétro déchirant et prolongé, mélancolique et caressant comme un violoncelle; avec la contrebasse, corsée, solide et noire comme un pur et vieux bitter. On pouvait même, si l'on voulait former un quintette, adjoindre un cinquième instrument, la harpe, qu'imitait par une vraisemblable analogie, la saveur vibrante, la note argentine, détachée et grêle du cumin sec.[18]

And here is Moore's passage. The girls and Mrs. Barton are choosing the cloth for the dresses they will wear to the Castle ball:

> Lengths of white silk clear as the notes of violins playing in a minor key; white poplin falling into folds statuesque as the bass of a fugue by Bach; yards of ruby velvet, rich as an air from Verdi played on the piano; tender green velvet, pastoral as hautboys heard beneath trees in a fair Arcadian vale; blue turquoise faille Française fanciful as the tinkling of of a guitar twanged by a Watteau shepherd; gold brocade, sumptuous as organ tones swelling through the jewelled twilight of a nave; scarves and trains of midnight-blue profound as the harmonic snoring of a bassoon; golden daffodils violent as the sound of a cornet; bouquets of pink roses and daisies, charmful and pure as the notes of a flute; white faille, soft draperies of tulle, garlands of white lilac, sprays of white heather, delicate and resonant as the treble voices of children singing carols in dewy English woods; berthas, flounces, plumes, stomachers, lappets, veils, frivolous as the strains of a German waltz played on Liddell's band. (162)

The similarities between the two passages are obvious: employing Baudelaire's theory of "correspondances," Huysmans compares the liqueurs to musical instruments, while Moore compares the dress materials to musical instruments. The differences between them, however, are equally apparent. Moore's passage, thoroughly pleasant (albeit somewhat humourous)[19] in its descriptive effect, lacks entirely the tone of sensuous intensity of Huysman's passage, as well as its underlying seriousness. Also, whereas Huysmans' description is of a literal event, however bizarre, Moore's description remains at the level of metaphor, however extended. These differences are instructive in assessing the influence of Huysmans' novel, which, unlike the single device Moore "borrowed" from Flaubert, pervades *A Drama in Muslin* throughout. In order to examine this influence, I would first like to look briefly at Huysmans' and Moore's respective reactions against naturalism.

Huysmans was one of the original members of *Le Groupe de Médan*. In his review of *L'Assommoir* shortly after it came out in 1876, he was loud in his acclaim of the novel and of naturalism, voicing the same defence of "morbid" subject matter that Oscar Wilde was to echo two decades later: "Art has nothing to do, I repeat, . . . with shame or shamelessness. A novel that is dirty is a novel that is badly written, and that is all there is to it."[20] This belief was not to change, but Huysmans' opinion of naturalism changed drastically. *À Rebours*, his first rebellion against Zola's school, flouted almost every naturalist tenet: it had an exotic, unusual, highly refined main character rather than lower class "types"; it dealt with inner states rather than outward reality; and it was written in an extremely lush and figurative language rather than an impartial mode. It is generally acknowledged to be the first symbolist novel,[21] and Arthur Symons referred to it as "the one real, the one quintessential, book which has been produced by the literature vaguely called decadent."[22] It led, ultimately, to the signing of the famous "Manifesto of the Five" by Zola's former devotees in 1887.[23] The reasons for Huysmans' defection are elaborated in his 1903 Preface to *À Rebours* in which he says that naturalism in 1884 was "condemned to go on repeating itself, marking time for ever on the same spot"[24] and "getting more and more out of breath by dint of turning the mill for ever in the same round,"[25] and in Durtal's speech in the opening chapter of *Là-Bas* (1891):

> Il faudrait, se disait-il, garder la véracité du document, la précision du détail, la langue étoffée et nerveuse du réalisme, mais il faudrait aussi se faire puisatier d'âme et ne pas vouloir expliquer le mystère par les maladies des sens; le roman, si cela se pouvait, devrait se diviser de lui-même en deux parts, néanmoins soudées ou plutôt confondues, comme elles le sont dans la vie, celle de l'âme, celle du corps, et s'occuper de leurs réactifs, de leurs confits, de leur entente. Il faudrait, en un mot, suivre la grande voie si profondément creusée par Zola, mais il serait nécessaire aussi de tracer en l'air un chemin parallèle, une autre route, d'atteindre les en deça et les après, de faire, en un mot, un naturalisme spiritualiste. . . .[26]

Durtal's mention of "l'âme" "le mystère" and "spiritualiste" provides the real key to Huysmans' rejection of naturalism: it was the exhausted materialistic subject-matter to which he objected most strongly. His new subject-matter, the sensual experimentation and soul-searching of the morbid and aristocratic Des Esseintes, caused

Arthur Symons to hail ecstatically "the astonishing caprice of *À Rebours*, in which [Huysmans] has concentrated all that is delicately depraved, all that is beautifully, curiously poisonous, in modern art. *À Rebours* is the history of a typical Decadent. . . . In the sensations and ideas of Des Esseintes we see the sensations and ideas of the effeminate, over-civilized, deliberately abnormal creature who is the last product of our society. . . ."[27]

Not all readers of the novel were able to share Symons' understanding of and enthusiasm for it, however. Richard Le Gallienne, for example (to whom Pater was replying in "The Decadent Movement in Literature"), defined decadence as "any point of view, seriously taken, which ignores the complete view. . . . At the bottom, decadence is merely limited thinking, often insane thinking. . . ."[28] Another critic who did not fully comprehend or assimilate the decadent aspect of *À Rebours* was George Moore.

As I pointed out in Chapter I, Moore first read Huysmans' novel in 1884, two years before the publication of *A Drama in Muslin*. In his review of it the same year, it is apparent that it was the book's style, rather than its content, which appealed to Moore. He speaks of Huysmans' "graces of fancy, imagination, and caprice that never fail to delight the literary *gourmet*," but calls its subject "a catalogue . . . of whimsical fantasies" filled with "matter . . . of little interest."[29] Even in the *Confessions*, whose hero to some extent apes Des Esseintes, Moore's praise of Huysmans has mainly to do with stylistic concerns: "Huysmans goes to my soul like a gold ornament of Byzantine workmanship;

there is in his style the yearning charm of arches, a sense of ritual, the passion of the mural, the window."[30] Susan Dick suggests that Moore "more fully appreciated" *À Rebours* on his second reading of it,[31] but his subsequent awkward attempts to write "aesthetic" novels, which I shall discuss in my Interchapter, indicate that Moore even then only imbibed the trappings rather than the spirit of decadence. Jacques-Emile Blanche, whom Moore asked to illustrate *A Drama in Muslin*, observes that "At that period he was fascinated by everything connected with Symbolism, Impressionism, and the artistic movement in Paris,"[32] but, as Holbrook Jackson remarks, Moore only "played at decadence"[33] during this time, and his understanding of symbolism, as well, did not mature until he wrote *The Lake* in 1905.

The subject-matter of *A Drama in Muslin*, therefore, was affected by Moore's reading of *À Rebours* hardly at all. In fact, the only artificial or decadent characters in it (Mrs. Barton, Mr. Barton and Cecilia Cullen) are regarded by the narrator with frank disapproval, as I shall show presently. Huysmans' style, however, complete with the colour symphonies, synaesthesia and "correspondances" so dear to the symbolists, is found everywhere. Moore's objection to naturalism, then, was different from that of Huysmans. As Noël observes, it was his aesthetic rather than his idealistic tendencies which drove Moore away from naturalism[34] ("What I reproach Zola with," says Moore, "is that he has no style").[35] To Zola himself Moore described *A Drama in Muslin* as marking a great advance "in *language*"[36] (my italics) compared with *A Mummer's Wife*.

Various critics have noted Moore's abrupt change of style in *A Drama in Muslin*. Joseph Hone sees the novel as "an attempt to escape from the plainness and literalism of *A Mummer's Wife*,"[37] and Frierson describes it as Moore's "first release from the sober naturalistic formula which he had formerly prescribed for himself."[38] Certainly Moore escaped "plainness" in *A Drama in Muslin*; the "dress material" passage is characteristic of the lush synaesthetic descriptions throughout the novel. In the crowded "Drawing Room" scene, for example, Moore gives us a striking confusion of odours and tastes:

> Momentarily the air grew hotter and more silicious; the brain ached with the dusty odour of poudre de ris, and the many acidities of evaporating perfume; the sugary sweetness of the blondes, the salt flavours of the brunettes, and this allegro movement of odours was interrupted suddenly by the garlicky andante, deep as the pedal notes of an organ, that the perspiring arms of a fat chaperon slowly exhaled. (173)

This description is succinct and effective, unlike the description of the women's shoulders in the same scene:

> To appease their terrible ennui, the men gazed down the backs of the women's dresses stupidly. Shoulders were there, of all tints and shapes. Indeed, it was like a vast rosary, alive with white, pink, and cream-coloured flowers: of Maréchal Niels, Souvenir de Malmaisons, Mademoiselle Eugène Verdiers, Aimée Vibert Scandens. Sweetly turned, adolescent shoulders, blush white, smooth and even as the petals of a Marquise Mortemarle; the strong, commonly turned shoulders, abundant and free as the fresh rosy pink of the Anna Alinuff; the drooping white shoulders, full of falling contours as a pale Madame Lacharme; the chlorotic shoulders, deadly white, of the almost greenish shade that is found in a Princess Clementine; the pert, the dainty little shoulders, filled with warm pink shadows, pretty and compact as Countess

> Cecile de Chabrillant; the large heavy shoulders full of vulgar madder tints, coarse, strawberry colour, enormous as a Paul Neron; clustering white shoulders, grouped like the blossoms of an Aimée Vibert Scandens, and, just in front of me, under my eyes, the flowery, the voluptuous, the statuesque shoulders of a tall blonde woman of thirty, whose flesh is full of the exquisite peach-like tones of a Mademoiselle Eugène Verdier, blooming in all its pride of summer loveliness. (172-73)

Like the "dress material" passage, this "colour symphony" is mere formula work, seemingly endless, and its very length causes it to have a humourous rather than a sensuous effect. Noël calls Moore's use of the theory of "correspondances" "desastreux" ("L'effet d'élégance tourbillonante, de griserie et de richesse est manqué"),[39] Farmer notes his "imitation assez laborieuse de Huysmans"[40] and Moore himself later regarded the style of *A Drama in Muslin* as one of a man "a little over anxious to possess himself of a vocabulary which would suffer him to tell all he saw, heard, smelt and touched . . . a headlong, eager, uncertain style."[41] But it is also highly likely that there is an element of parody in Moore's lengthy "correspondances" passages, especially in light of his somewhat derogatory remarks about the symbolists' theories of colour and "correspondances" in *Confessions:*

> According to M. Ghil . . . it would appear that the syllables of the French language evoke in us the sensations of different colours; consequently the timbre of the different instruments. The vowel *u* corresponds to the colour yellow, and therefore to the sound of flutes. Arthur Rimbaud was, it is true, first in the field with these pleasant and genial theories; but M. Ghil informs us that Rimbaud was mistaken in many things, particularly in coupling the sound of the vowel *u* with the colour green instead of with the colour yellow. M. Ghil has corrected this very stupid blunder and many others. . . .[42]

Another noteworthy aspect of Moore's colour symphony of shoulders is its "painterly" quality: distinctions are made among the various shades of flesh tones with reference to the colours of a painter's palette ("blush white," "chlorotic . . . deadly white, . . . almost greenish," "warm pink shadows," vulgar madder tints," et cetera). Such vivid and precise colour images are generally extremely well suited to the subject-matter of *A Drama in Muslin*; the girls and their finery, which constitute an important part of the novel, are lovingly described in this way. It is with a painter's eye, for example, that Moore compares May and Olive in their new dresses:

> May had just stood up to show off her skirt. She was a superb specimen of a fat girl; and in a glow of orange ribbons and red hair she commanded admiration. . . . Then Olive stood up: she was all rose, and when, laughing, with a delicious movement of the arms she hitched back her bustle, she lost her original air, and looked as might have done the Fornarina when not sitting in immortality. It was the battle of blonde tints: Olive, with primroses and corn; May, with a cadmium yellow and red gold. (48)

Such "colour symphonies" are slightly different from the "impressionistic" descriptions (such as that of the piles of crockery in Chapter 4) in *A Mummer's Wife*. In that novel, in true naturalistic fashion, most of the descriptions were of natural objects in various lights; in *A Drama in Muslin* it is usually artificial objects which are so described, and colour, rather than light, is emphasized. Take, for example, the dazzling picture Moore gives us of Olive as she is presented to the Lord-Lieutenant:

> What white wonder, what manifold marvel of art! Dress of snow satin, skirt quite plain in front. Bodice and train of white poplin; the latter wrought with patterns representing night and morning: a morning made of silver leaves with silver birds fluttering through leafy trees, butterflies sporting among them, and over all a sunrise worked in gold and silver thread; then on the left side the same sun sank amid rosy clouds, and there butterflies slept with folded wing, and there birds roosted on bending boughs; veils of silver tissue softened the edges of the train, and silver-stars gleamed in the corn-coloured hair, and the long hands, gloved with white undressed kid, carried a silver fan. She was adorably beautiful and adorably pale; and like some wonderful white bird of downy plumage she sailed through the red glare, along the scarlet line, unto the weary-looking man in maroon breeches. (175)

This is a "symphony in white and silver" rather than an impression. It is effective, but it is on the edge of being self-indulgent and ineffective, simply by virtue of its sheer length. Also, its thrust is primarily verbal rather than visual; the reader tends to become lost in the details and therefore fails to "see" Olive very clearly. A similar observation might be made of the description of the sunset which occurs in the first chapter of the novel, which is even more amorphous and indistinct:

> The brown sails were now filled with the glories of the sunset; the air was full of languor and sorrow, and the evening had all the mystic charm of the corpse of a fragile maiden poetised by the ravages of a long malady, perfumed and prepared, according to some antique rite, for a jewel-bespangled bier; eyelids and cheeks painted, hands set in sculptured poses—the finger-nails tinted with rose. Cloud draperies, striped with orange and garnished with crimson fringes, trailed as the pageant moved; and overhead the firmamental blue was stretched like a pall of turquoise-tinted silk. From the deeps of the sky the music of colour was chanted, and delicious but inaudible harmonies vibrated through the golden soul of

> the twilight. . . . The violet waters of the bay had darkened; and, like the separating banners of a homeward-moving procession, the colours of the sky went east and west. The girdle of rubies had melted, had become the pale red lining of a falling mantle; the large spaces of gold grew dim; orange and yellow streamers blended; lilac and blue pennons faded to deep greys; dark hoods and dark veils were drawn closer, purple was gathered like garments about the loins, and the night fell. (16, 18)

This vagueness is not necessarily a flaw, however, especially given Moore's new proclivities; as A. J. Farmer points out, "les images indécises, essentiellement suggestives, portent la marque de la technique symboliste."[43] In addition to the colour symphony in the sunset passage, there is also a curious inversion in the controlling metaphor: nature is described here in terms of artificiality—the sunset is likened to the draperies surrounding a painted corpse. This provides a nice contrast to the passage describing Olive's dress (itself an artificial object), in which much mention was made of the natural objects embossed on it—leaves, birds, trees, butterflies, clouds, stars and plumage. This artificializing of nature echoes Des Esseintes' obsession with artificiality (represented by his plants and his tortoise in particular), which was to become a preoccupation of the "fin-de-siècle" mentality (Wilde's "The Decay of Lying" is probably the most famous example).

In contrast to the rich colours of the "social" scenes, dark, threatening tones are used to depict the poverty-stricken Irish tenants whose plight constitutes the novel's secondary plot. As Alice, Olive and Mrs. Barton return from a visit, they see from their carriage that

> Around them the barren country lay submerged in shadows; the ridge of the uplands melted into the drifting grey of the sky, and every moment the hearth-fire of a cabin started into or disappeared from sight. They burned, steadfast and solitary, in the dim wastes that stretched from hill to hill, or were seen in clusters between the dark blowing foliage of the roadside poplars; and as the carriage passed, on a doorway full of yellow light, the form of a man was often sketched in menacing black. (51)

There is seemingly nothing matter-of-fact or "naturalistic" about such descriptions; on the contrary, they seem almost mystical. Moore appears to have rejected completely the naturalists' precise, flatly-rendered descriptions in favour of Huysmans' lush decorative ones. The difference in the styles of *A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin* is astonishing, in fact. Nothing could be farther from the restrained, matter-of-fact prose of *A Mummer's Wife* than the elaborate colour symphonies I have examined. Also, as I have shown, there were few metaphors in the staid reporting of *A Mummer's Wife*; in *A Drama in Muslin* there are many, and they constantly verge on the fanciful. Of the political struggle we are told that

> The revolt of the people became more determined and implacable. In the mist and mud of the slums plots and counter-plots were hatched, and, breaking their shells, they emerged like reptiles into a terrible and multiform existence; out of the slime they crawled in strange and formless confusion, and in the twilight of nationhood they fought the obscure and blind battle of birth. (218)

We are also told, in similes reminiscent of Huysmans' "images forces," that Olive in her red tulle resembles "a white rose in a blood-coloured glass" (41), and that the night "hung like a mysterious blue flower" above the girls (86).

Such a style is highly figurative, by any standard, and in general is eminently well-suited to the material of the novel. S. M. Steward is dismissive and scornful both of this material ("The book in matter is banal, its treatment mediocre; its story is merely the husband-quest of the daughters of a bourgeois Dublin family")[44] and of Moore's adaptation of Huysmans' style, denouncing the "heavy and laborious imitations of the precise word-images in the use of which Huysmans was most adroit. With a lumbering, unflavoured touch, [Moore] contrives his similes. . . . There is . . . a sensation that he is working at a novel and unfamiliar art, and sweating over his chisels."[45] Steward fails to prove his point, simply quoting the imitative "correspondances" passages in *A Drama in Muslin* without saying why he finds them so clumsy. He concludes his discussion of the novel, however, with the statement that "Though *A Drama in Muslin* limps along like one of Zola's easy virtued ladies tricked out in attempts at spurious finery and cheap beads, it must be admitted that it is the first novel in English directly inspired by the symbolist movement in France."[46] Such an achievement is significant in itself; but it must also be recognized that, while *A Drama in Muslin* was "inspired by" the symbolist movement, it was far from being a symbolist novel. Although its style is radically different from the starkly objective style of *A Mummer's Wife*, there are several vestiges of naturalism in *A Drama in Muslin*. Moore retained the naturalists' "documentary technique" in researching his material, for example: Hone's remark that "Clearly he still regarded

Zola as his master in method"[47] refers to Moore's frantic (and futile) attempt to procure an invitation to Dublin Castle in order to collect information for his book, which resulted in the frustrated Moore defiantly publishing all of his requests and the State Steward's refusals in the *Freeman's Journal*. He was still "a man with a notebook" doing painstaking research in the interests of accurate description. Also, he retains the naturalists' unflinching attitude toward the candid rendering of unpleasant physical details. Along with the somewhat florid and fanciful descriptions I have already noted, there exists blunt mention of "the weed-grown avenue . . . covered with cowdung" (56), May's "shammy-leather drawers" (85), and the underlings swarming about the mock court "like flies about a choice pile of excrement" (181). We are also given the graphic details of May's pregnancy ("And the strange sickening fancies; I see things in the shops that tempt me, sometimes it is a dry biscuit, sometimes a basket of strawberries, but whatever it is I stand and look at it, long for it until weary of longing and standing with a sort of weight weighing me down, and my stays all rucking up to my neck, I crawl home" [257]); of the peasants' poverty ("There, in the most sheltered corner, the father, down with fever, lies shivering, with nothing to drink but cold water, nothing to eat but a potato . . . last week it rained so heavily that the wife had to get up three times in the night to wring the sheets out" [292]); and of Olive's illness:

> Olive lay suffering in all the dire humility of the flesh. Hourly her breathing grew shorter and more hurried, her

> cough more frequent, and the expectoration that accompanied it darker and thicker in colour. The beautiful eyes were now turgid and dull, the lids hung heavily over a line of filmy blue, and a thick scaly layer of bloody tenacious mucus persistently accumulated and covered the tiny and once almost jewel-like teeth. (295)

The latter, in fact, is no less graphic—and is possibly even more so—than the descriptions of naturalistic deaths such as Emma Bovary's, Nana's or Kate Ede's, to which I have already alluded in Chapter II. These naturalistic details fit into the novel well despite its poetic style, simply because of Alice's growth as a central character. They are all things she must experience and understand in order to see her world clearly. As Peter Ure remarks, "In *A Drama in Muslin* . . . Moore has contrived that everything that he shows us constitutes in the end the substance of the 'ideas' by which Alice thinks and judges."[48] Also, the naturalistic precision of detail coincides nicely with the symbolist notion that one's surroundings are expressive of one's soul. The initial description of Alice's and Olive's bedroom, for example, functions both as a precise physical description and as an ironic comment on how their match-making mother supposedly wishes them to think:

> Above each pillow, entwined with a rosary, there was a font for holywater. The room was papered with a clear paper, covered with light blue spots, relieved with a border in darker blue, representing a sash. The two little hanging bookcases were filled with suitable volumes; half-a-dozen novels by writers acknowledged to understand the ways and usages of good society, a history, a few elegantly-bound books that looked like school-prizes, and a prayer-book or two. The wardrobes

> were in white-painted wood. Alice's was next the door, Olive's was at the opposite end of the room, facing the beds. There was but one toilet-table, but it was prettily adorned with flowing skirts, and furnished with tall wax-candles. It stood under the window next the marble washstand, with its double sets of basins, jugs and glasses. There were but two pictures. "Le Printemps" was represented by a laughing youth and a maiden, swinging amid budding trees and blossoming flowers. The other showed a loving girl, carving her sweetheart's name on the grandest oak in her father's domain. (32)

Even more important to the novel than any such naturalistic descriptions, however, is the fact that its theme is based solidly on the naturalistic doctrine of the importance of heredity (Huysmans, too, bows briefly to this theory in the opening pages of *À Rebours*: "La decadence de cette ancienne maison avait, sans nul doute, suivi régulièrement son cours").[49] This is demonstrated in the Darwinian notion of the "survival of the fittest" which underpins the events of the whole novel, as well as in such overt theorizing as the following in the narrator's description of Olive:

> It was easy to see that, from the imaginative but constantly unhinging intelligence of the father, the next step downwards was the weak, feather-brained daughter. In what secret source, lost far back in the night of generations, was this human river polluted? Will the pure waters of some tributary again make it clean, or will it grow more and more tainted until finally lost in a shrieking sea of madness whose tumult is heard in the far distance answering prophetically the boasts of civilisation? These are the terrible questions that an examination of the history of families propounds, and to which the scientists can as yet make no answer. Yet, how absolutely consequent are these laws of heredity. (38)

It is immediately obvious that, although this passage is enunciating virtually the same principles as the narrator enunciated in *A Mummer's*

Wife with regard to Kate, it is not the same sort of thing at all. For one thing, it is couched in the elaborately metaphorical style (the "human river," "shrieking sea of madness") that Moore derived from Huysmans. For another, it is voiced by a frankly omniscient narrator who is characteristic of the whole of *A Drama in Muslin*, and it therefore avoids the "tacked-on" quality of similar asides in *A Mummer's Wife*. Alice's and Cecelia's personalities are likewise explained in terms of their heredity:

> Alice Barton's power to judge between right and wrong, her love of sentiment, her collectedness, yes, I will say her reasoned collectedness were, as has been already partially shown, the consequence of the passivity of the life and nature of her grandfather (the historian); her power of will, and her clear concise intelligence were inherited from her mother, and these qualities being placed in a perfectly healthy subject, a subject in whom every organ functioned admirably, the result was a mind that turned instinctively from mysticism and its adjuncts. . . .
> And Cecelia's dark and illogical mind can also be accounted for. Her hatred of all that concerned sexual passion was consequent on her father's age and her mother's loathing for him during conception and pregnancy; and then, if it be considered that this transmitted hatred was planted and left to germinate in a misshapen body, it will be understood how a weird love of the spiritual, of the mystical, was the almost inevitable psychical characteristic that a human being born under such circumstances would possess. (187)

The narrator who articulates such theories is an interesting personage, whom I will examine presently in some detail.

In the meantime, having noted all of these literary "ingredients" of *A Drama in Muslin*—a Balzacian subject, at least one Flaubertian scene, a Huysmansesque style and a smattering of Zolaesque theory—it is perhaps astonishing to discover that the predominant impression the novel makes, and the quality that draws its disparate elements together, is its overwhelming Victorianism.

From the very first scene, with its "white dresses . . . [fluttering] through the verdurous vistas like the snowy plumage of a hundred doves" and "the sunlight glancing along the little white legs, proudly and charmingly advanced" (1), the whole conception of the novel echoes the typical Victorian "society" novel. There is not a single plot, but several: the novel follows the fortunes of five of the young ladies who, in the opening scene, are just leaving the convent, and parallel to these events are the political fortunes of the Irish Land League. Briefly, the plain heroine of the novel, Alice Barton, along with her beautiful sister Olive, the angelic Violet Scully and the voluptuous May Gould, all go with their mothers to Dublin for the "season" and attend the Lord-Lieutenant's "Drawing-Room" in order to try to find husbands for themselves. The fortunes of these young women in the marriage-market, and particularly those of Alice, constitute the main events of the plot. Olive and Violet, the belles of the season, vie for the attentions of the "little Marquis," Lord Kilcarney. He falls in love with Violet, whereupon Olive attempts to elope with Captain Hibbert, her former suitor. May becomes pregnant by the disreputable Fred Scully, who then deserts her. Cecilia Cullen, the other convent-girl, is a hunchback and never enters the marriage-market at all. Instead she becomes fanatically religious and finally re-enters the convent as a nun. In contrast to these upper-class social concerns is the plight of the poverty-stricken tenants, who refuse to pay their rents and threaten the landlords with violence. Alice observes all of these things and draws her own conclusions from them, finally rejecting both the marriage-market and the Irish upper class by marrying a country doctor and moving to middle-class Kensington, where she pursues a writing career. It can be seen from even this sketchy outline that the events of *A Drama in Muslin* are nothing like those of the typically bleak naturalist novel, and even less like those of the exotic symbolist *À Rebours*. Its chief preoccupations—love, courtship and the marital fortunes of young ladies—are the preoccupations of Trollope, Meredith and Jane Austen rather than Zola or Huysmans.

Jane Austen, in particular, was much admired by Moore. In *Avowals* (1919), he was to bestow the following extravagant praise on her:

> Miss Austen was the inventor of a new medium of literary expression . . . [she] was the inventor of the formula whereby domestic life may be described; and . . . every one of us, without exception, Balzac and Tourgueneff as much as Mrs. Henry Wood and Anthony Trollope, is indebted to her. . . . If the great dead were to reawaken, the Austen wine might be offered to Virgil, Catullus, Horace, Longus, Apuleius and Petronius Arbiter without fear that they would run to the window to puke, making wry faces.[50]

He goes on to describe her as "the first, a Giotto among women,"[51] and avers that in her novels "we find the burning human heart in English prose narrative for the first, and, alas, for the last time."[52] That Alice is Moore's attempt to portray "the burning human heart," and that she has certain affinities with Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet, there is no doubt. I will discuss these qualities presently; in the meantime, I hope to show that the overall conception of Moore's third novel provides ample evidence of its affinities with the English realistic tradition.

2. The Victorian Narrator

To begin, the omniscient narrator, what J. Hillis Miller calls the "determining principle"[53] of the form of nineteenth century fiction, is very much in evidence. Unlike the objective, almost perfectly neutral narrator in *A Mummer's Wife*, the narrator in *A Drama in Muslin* freely comments on the events, speaks directly to the reader, and is strongly biased in favour of the main character. The point of view, while it is predominantly Alice's, is shifted at various points to Mrs. Barton, Olive, the Marquis, and even momentarily to minor characters such as May and Cecilia.

On the very first page of the novel, the narrator speaks directly to the reader in describing one of the girls: "*You see her* at the end of a gravel-walk, examining the flower she has just picked. . . ." (1, my italics). This form (with variants, such as "let us look") occurs at several other points in the novel as well, usually as a distancing device when the narrator wants to make a point. Before the description of Alice's and Olive's bedroom, for example, which I have already quoted, the narrator says specifically that

> The room was a symbol of girlhood. By skilful arrangement, Mrs. Barton had created the idea of the playful purity and the daisy-like candour which we so willingly assume as representative of the mind of sweet seventeen. Innocence, piety, and gaiety went, it would appear, trippingly hand-in-hand. (32)

Later, after Alice has begun to make money through her writing, there is another description of the bedroom, complete with further narrative commentary to point up the contrast with the earlier description:

> *You see* the white room; the two white beds, the white curtains hanging from the two brass crowns, the chimney-piece covered with tiny ornaments and the fireplace shut in with white embroidered curtains; *you see* the white wall-paper freckled with small flowers, the two engravings (the Youth and Maiden swinging, the Girl carving her Lover's Name on the Beech-tree). *You see* the two little bookcases filled with neatly bound volumes—a few choice novels and some prayer-books: the rosaries still hanging from the holy-water fonts. *You remember* when *you first saw* this room? Is it the same now as it was then? Not exactly. A writing-table has been set in the window; it is covered with papers amd MSS., Darwin's "Origin of Species," Matthew Arnold and James Thomson have been added to the bookshelves; Carlyle's Essays—a sixpenny edition—lies on the sofa, at the foot of the beds. (255, my italics)

Certainly this is spoken by a very different narrator from the one in *A Mummer's Wife* who adopted the stance of a dispassionate observer. The rhetorical questions, in particular ("You remember . . . ?" "Is it the same . . . ?"), point to a narrator who takes a rather lofty attitude to both his readers and his material, and who is furthermore quite willing to direct the reader in the the process of reading as well as in the proper response to the novel. Throughout the book this narrator frequently expresses his own opinion, and tells the reader what his should be, of the characters and their actions. Of Olive, for instance, he states that

> In the beautiful framework nothing was wanting but a mind. She was, in a word, a human flower—a rose—a carnation that a wicked magician had endowed with the power of speech. (4)

Such forthright vouchsafing of the narrator's opinion of his characters is a common characteristic of the omniscient narrator. The above passage, for instance, although it is somewhat "prettier," is certainly no less direct than Hardy's flat statement about Arabella in the opening pages of *Jude*:

> She was a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less.[54]

Lord Dungory (Mrs. Barton's elderly lover), Mrs. Barton, and of course Alice are similarly summarized for the reader at various points: of Lord Dungory the narrator scornfully remarks that

> It is easy to read the marking on this shell. Lord Dungory was a concession, and he compromised now with time, as he had compromised before in politics, in racing, in friendship. At different periods he had passed for a man of ability, but, through powerlessness to stand by an idea, he had never achieved anything very tangible. (24)

His attitude toward Mrs. Barton, too, is unequivocal:

> There was an insidious magic in Mrs. Barton's laugh; it was artificial, irresistible, gleeful, birdlike as an opera by Offenbach; it was characteristic of the woman; it tempted you to look upon life lightly; it helped you to play with, to twirl your worst sorrows

> round your finger. Had fate favoured Mrs. Barton she might have been a royal courtezan. . . . Twenty years of elegant harlotry had blunted her finer perceptions. (131, 205)

It is somewhat surprising to note that, unlike the determinedly amoral narrator of *A Modern Lover* and *A Mummer's Wife*, who would never have made any such judgments about the conduct of Lewis Seymour or Kate Ede, this narrator objects to these characters on moral grounds: Lord Dungory is a "concession," and Mrs. Barton is a "harlot." Alice, on the other hand, is portrayed as being just as unequivocally good as the latter characters are bad:

> How then . . . had she consented to live so many years conforming outwardly to all the tenets of a religion which she recognised as an absurdity? The explanation of this seeming anomaly is found in the last line of the preceding paragraph: "An unsatisfactory ideal, which aspires to no more than saving oneself after all." In every nature there is a dominating force, which decides victory or defeat on all occasions. In Alice, this took the form of supreme unselfishness; she could not—it was impossible for her to do or say anything—when, by so doing, she knew she might cause suffering, or give pain to anyone, even an enemy. And it was this defect in Alice Barton's character that forced her pitilessly, against any will of her own, to enact, to live up to what she deemed a lie. (66-67)

This description of Alice's inherent virtue is interesting, not only because it asserts the narrator's opinion of the character so openly, but also because of its extreme self-consciousness. The circumlocution ("the explanation of this seeming anomaly"), the didactic tone ("In every nature there is a dominating force" et cetera) and the apparent awkwardness ("found in the last line of the preceding paragraph") are all characteristic of the supremely wise Victorian narrator who remains extremely aware of (and frank about) his role as creator. The latter characteristic, in particular—the recognition that the novelist is writing a novel—was what Henry James viewed askance in Trollope as the "betrayal of a sacred office":

> Certain accomplished novelists have a habit of giving themselves away which must often bring tears to the eyes of people who take their fiction seriously. I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope, with his want of discretion in this particular. In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, he concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only "making believe." He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened. . . . Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime; it is what I mean by the attitude of apology. . . . It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing-room.[55]

As I have shown, Moore directly admits the reader (addressing him as "you") into his confidence; but Moore's attitude is hardly one of "make-believe," nor does his awareness of his role as author hold any hint of "apology." As much as James, Moore regarded the novelist's "office" as "sacred"; in *Literature at Nurse* he describes "the bond of sympathy that should exist between reader and writer . . . a bond as sacred and as intimate as that which unites a tree to the earth."[56] And, later in *A Drama in Muslin*, Moore uses the same analogy as James—that between the novelist and the historian—to express his views about the seriousness of novel-writing:

> The history of a nation as often lies hidden in social wrongs and domestic griefs as in the story of revolution, and if it be for the historian to narrate the one, it is for the novelist to dissect and explain the other. . . . (203-04)

The narrator's omniscience in *A Drama in Muslin* (which ends with a similarly candid reference to "the poor muslin martyrs, whose sufferings were the theme of this book" [329]) could be characterized, then, as Victorian with a difference, the difference being Moore's conscious use of the device. Hardy, almost a decade later, was still capable of referring to "the last pages to which the chronicler of these lives would ask the reader's attention,"[57] with a tone of elaborate courtesy which presumably would have horrified James. Moore's more straightforward self-awareness removes the "coy" element from such disclosures.

A related kind of self-consciousness on the part of the narrator is evidenced in many of his "theoretical" statements, such as the one about the differences between Cecilia and Alice:

> But as the corporeal and incorporeal hereditaments of Alice Barton and Lady Cecilia Cullen were examined fully in the beginning of this chapter, it is only necessary to here indicate the order of ideas—the moral atmosphere of the time—to understand the efflorescence of the two minds, and to realise how curiously representative they are of this last quarter of the nineteenth century. (196)

Here, the narrator displays an awareness not only of the fact that he is writing a novel (referring the reader to "the beginning of this chapter"), but also of exactly *when* he is writing it ("this last quarter of the nineteenth century"). This awareness occurs several times (he refers to "Alice Barton, who is if anything a representative woman of 1885" [229], and in another instance declares that "The form here is nineteenth century, but the spirit is eternal. . . . " [279]), and each time it has a curiously "modern" effect, as though Moore were in fact looking back on his own period as he writes about it. Perhaps this represents Moore's adherence to Huysmans' dictum that the artist should be of his own time. Again, the awareness with which Moore employs the device of omniscience gives it a distinctive flavour, one which could be described as Victorian with faintly modern overtones.

A similar complexity can be discerned in the personality of the narrator himself. On one hand, he overtly disparages Arthur Barton, the effete, ineffectual painter who "square[s] his shoulders, pull[s] at his flowing beard, and growl[s] as if he were keeping at bay the deep emotions that were supposed to be continually throbbing within him" (25), and who, when he has to deal with his tenants,

> could think of nothing but the muscles of the strained back of a dying Briton, and a Roman soldier who cut the cords that bound the white captive to the sacrificial oak. He declared that it would be no use returning to the studio until these infernal tenants were settled with, and he loitered about the drawing-room windows looking pale, picturesque, and lymphatic. (122)

On the other hand, the narrator himself, as I have shown, frequently indulges in "painterly" descriptions during the course of the novel. A good example of this underlying, energizing tension between the novel's theme and its style are the descriptions of Olive and Alice lying in their beds on their first night home from the convent. Olive is described from Alice's point of view; "Alice," we are told, "looked anxiously at her sister":

> The dark masses of hair lying on the pillows were touched with gold. In a beautiful abandonment of attitude the girl slept; delicate shadows veiled her face, and from her lips, fresh as fruit, seemed to rise the breath of a beautiful dream. The covertures floated away in folds, that were melodies; not a line was defined. Less human she was than a Titian, less precise than a Raphael; she was, perhaps, like a figure set by Phidias in a dream of eternal youth, or the nebulous birth of an angel, unfolding its loveliness beneath the suscitating smiles of a god. Olive had now all the beauty of inanimate Nature, and, unconscious of all things, save the sense of living that a rose may feel in the dew-time, she slept. (32)

Alice, who is described by the narrator, presents a very different picture:

> A thin girl, pale from want of rest; her pointed shoulders and long arms were not beautiful like Olive's, and she had no thick tresses to scatter over the pillow; her brown hair was rolled, and pinned with one hairpin into a small knot. The forehead swept above the marked eyebrows in a wide, clear path; the hands, although well-shaped, were sinewy and strong. She had not a feature that was either regular or attractive; but her face was one of interest to the critical observer; for now, when the quick, uncertain thoughts swept across her mind, the eyes, like a grey lake in a sudden sun, were flooded with bright attractiveness, and the formless features gained, through expression, a precision not their own. (33)

The contrasts in the two descriptions are obvious. Olive is a beautiful still life, and is likened to a work of art and to "inanimate Nature." Alice has a very different kind of beauty, a beauty that springs from thought (rather than form) and from action. This contrast is further emphasized by the fact that Alice is awake while Olive is sleeping.

Alice, of course, represents the kind of beauty—inner moral and intellectual beauty—which is the basis for the theme of the entire novel. What is interesting, however, is the obvious enjoyment the narrator takes in describing Olive's more "aesthetic" beauty. There is certainly nothing in the description of Alice to compare with the sensual voluptuousness of Olive's "lips, fresh as fruit," "the covertures [which] floated away in folds, that were melodies" or the "nebulous birth of an angel, unfolding its loveliness beneath the suscitating smiles of a god." Although the narrator "officially" approves of Alice's intellect and disapproves of Olive's vapid beauty, it would seem that he is instinctively attracted to the latter. It is not surprising that Moore's next four novels and the *Confessions* deal sympathetically with the type of aesthete represented by Mr. Barton. The latter, rather than Lord Dungory as Farmer suggests, is "une figure qui sera tirée à maints exemplaires dans les romans de la fin du siècle."[58] This complexity in the narrator is a fine instance of Helmut Gerber's observation that "In one way or another two voices are engaged in a dialogue in almost all of George Moore's work. In most of his work one senses not only the intrinsic fictional oppositions but also the oppositions within the writer at the time he is writing. The result, however, is not necessarily an awkward intrusiveness or a confused babble. When his ambivalence on a given subject is identical or nearly identical with the thematic conflicts, the result is often a heightening of the fictional drama and usually a greater sense of George Moore's own sympathetic commitment."[59] Gerber goes on to say that "*Esther* is a book of this kind"; I think that *A Drama in Muslin* is too, at least in its conflict between the narrator's "realistic" and "aesthetic" proclivities.

The narrator of the novel, though, however complex, remains omniscient. In fact, *A Drama in Muslin* is the only one of Moore's novels which has such an omnipresent and intrusive narrator. Not surprisingly, this personage exhibits both the faults and the virtues of other typically Victorian narrators, such as those of Hardy, Meredith, Trollope or George Eliot. His learned asides to the reader, a function of his omniscience, sometimes take on a pedantic, slightly lecturing tone, as in the following digression in Alice's thoughts about religion:

> How often do we find—nay, do we not always find—that the aesthetic and philosophic aspirations of an epoch—ideas which we believe to have been the invention of individuals, are but the intellectual atmosphere of that epoch breathed in greater or less quantities by all? Nor does the phenomenon cease here; for the sensitivity of some is so great that they anticipate—obeying an unknown law of attraction—ideas not yet in existence, but which are quickening in the womb of the world. Wordsworth is an example of this foreseeing, forefeeling, forehearing. For at the time of writing the "Excursion" the influence of the German pessimists had not penetrated into England; Schopenhauer was an unknown name; and yet poet and philosopher seem but the expansion of a single mind.
>
> Is it therefore unnatural or even extraordinary that Alice Barton, who is if anything a representative woman of 1885, should have . . . divined the doctrines of Eduard von Hartman? (228-29)

This philosophical "explanation" of Alice's beliefs, calling upon the reader's own background knowledge (of Wordsworth, Schopenhauer and von Hartman) and making a sage generalization about life ("do we not always find . . . ") is characteristic of the wise Victorian narrator-as-teacher.[60] Its somewhat elaborate rhetoric ("How often do we find—nay, do we not always . . . ," "Is it therefore unnatural . . .") and formal vocabulary ("phenomenon," "quickening," "foreseeing, forefeeling, forehearing") make it susceptible to the criticisms of a "clumsy aiming at impressiveness" and an "awkward Victorian journalese" with which Frank Chapman charges Hardy.[61] Apart from its tone, however, this aside is interesting, especially in this particular novel. Its main idea—that of a Zeitgeist, of "ideas . . . quickening in the womb of the world"—seems a direct echo of Arnold and of Pater. According to Hone, Moore read Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* when he was in the final stages of writing *A Drama in Muslin*; from Moore's account of this experience in *Confessions* (in which *Marius* constitutes Moore's fourth "echo-augury") it would seem that this was his first experience of Pater's work. The above passage, however, along with the appearance later in the novel of *The Renaissance* on Alice's bookshelf (which, according to Robert Sechler, is the "first allusion in Mr. Moore's works to Walter Pater")[62] is solid enough evidence that Moore was at least acquainted with the latter book at this time.

The fact remains, however, that such a narrator tends to tell the reader too much, rather than too little, about the theoretical concepts on which his novel is based. Such theorizing, as I noted in Chapter II, is at the opposite extreme from the naturalists' neutral reporting of the externals of life. Another instance in which such a philosophical intrusion tends to disrupt (or in this case replace) the flow of narrative events is in the long description and analysis of the suburban Kensington street where Alice goes to live with her husband. "To some this air of dull well-to-do-ness," we read,

> may seem as intolerable, as obscene in its way as the look of melancholy silliness which the Dubliners and their dirty city wear so unintermittently. One is the inevitable decay which must preclude an outburst of national energy; the other is the smug optimism, that fund of materialism on which a nation lives, and which in truth represents the bulwarks wherewith civilisation defends itself against those sempiternal storms which, like atmospheric convulsions, by destroying, renew the tired life of man. (325)

The "sempiternal storms" and "atmospheric convulsions," especially, smack of the exaggerated Victorian erudition of which even the best nineteenth-century novelists are occasionally guilty.

But the narrator of *A Drama in Muslin* also displays some of the better Victorian qualities. It is surprising, in fact, that Moore could write an effective novel in a mode he affected to despise. His freely-expressed opinions range from pity and indignation to pathos and humour, and he gives the impression of caring deeply about the fates of his characters. Even the slightly foolish May is viewed with sympathy. When she comes to congratulate Alice on her forthcoming marriage, Alice is appalled by her confession that she has again taken a lover, and so is the reader until the narrator confides that

> At last they went downstairs, and in the hall, May showed Alice the beautiful wedding-present she had bought her, and the girl did not say that she had sold her hunter to buy it. (319)

Thus the narrator shares with the reader information about his characters to which not even the knowledgeable Alice is privy, and exhibits a wide sympathy which includes not only May but the Miss Brennans, the Miss Gores and the other "muslin martyrs."

Great sympathy is also expressed for the Irish peasants. As the carriages roll through the Dublin streets toward the Castle, the finely-dressed women look out, and the reader is made to see what they see:

> On the left is squalor multiform and terrible. The plaster, in huge scabs falls from the walls, and the flaring light of a tallow candle reveals a dismantled room. You see a huge shouldered mother, a lean-faced crone, and a squatting tailor that poverty chains till midnight to his work-board; you see a couple of coarse girls, maids of all work, who smile and call to the dripping coachmen on the boxes; and there are low shops filled with cheap cigars and tobacco, shops where old clothes rot in fetid confusion, shops exhaling the rancid odours of decaying vegetables, shops dingy with rusting iron and cracked china, shops that traffic in obscene goods and prints; shops and streets that are but a leer of malign decrepitude. And as you near the Castle the traces of the destroyer become more apparent—more foul. . . . In the broad glare of the carriage lights the shape of every feature, even the colour of the eyes, every glance, every detail of dress, every stain of misery were revealed to the silken exquisites who, a little frightened, strove to hide themselves within the scented shadows of their broughams: and in like manner, the bloom on every aristocratic cheek, the glitter of every diamond, the richness of every plume were visible to the avid eyes of those who stood without in the wet and the cold. (170-71)

The narrator's social indignation here, combined with the vivid naturalistic details, is a foretaste of the "English naturalism" that was to become popular in the novels of such writers as Gissing, Maugham and Morrison in the 1890's.[63] Milton Chaikin speaks of Moore's "withering contempt for the milieu" of *A Drama in Muslin* which "has roots in his antipathy for Ireland and . . . the hostilities of the French realists,"[64] but such remarks are inaccurate. The tone of the above passage, far from displaying "withering contempt" or "hostility," is one of a comprehensive pity, of anger in the face of social wrongs. Judgmental terms such as "terrible," "destroyer," "misery" and "frightened" create a very different mood than the neutral Zolaesque reporting of squalid details that we found in *A Mummer's Wife*, for example. The narrator who uses such terms seems much more akin to the narrator in Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* in his expression of personal indignation than to Zola's narrator in *L'Assommoir*. Gissing's novel, which is typical of English naturalism, begins in the following way:

> Walk with me, reader, into Whitecross Street. . . . The fronts of the houses, as we glance up towards the deep blackness overhead, have a decayed, filthy, often an evil, look; and here and there, on either side, is a low, yawning archway, or a passage some four feet wide, leading presumably to human habitations. Let us press through the throng to the mouth of one of these and look in, as long as the reeking odour will permit us. Straining the eyes into horrible darkness, we behold a blind alley, the unspeakable abominations of which are dimly suggested by a gas-lamp flickering at the further end. Here and there through a window glimmers a reddish light, forcing one to believe that people actually do live here; otherwise the alley is deserted, and the footstep echoes as we tread cautiously up the narrow slum. . . . Children are born here, and men and women die. Let us devoutly hope that the deaths exceed the births.[65]

These two predominant sympathies of the narrator in *A Drama in Muslin*—sympathy for the girls in the marriage-market and sympathy for the tenants in the Land League—are thrown into constant juxtaposition:

> Who would say which is of the most vital importance—the thunder of the people against the oppression of the Castle, or the unnatural sterility, the cruel idleness of mind and body of the muslin martyrs who cover with their white skirts the shames of Cork Hill? (204)

Here the narrator's pity and indignation are reflected in the rhythm and cadence (especially of "the muslin martyrs who cover with their white skirts the shames of Cork Hill") as well as in the words.

Although it is a more optimistic novel than *A Mummer's Wife* in that its heroine is happy at the end, *A Drama in Muslin* on the whole contains less humour. The acting milieu in the former, at least, was full of light-hearted wit, and many of Dick's perceptions were ironically funny. It is significant that the few instances of humour in *A Drama in Muslin* are given by the narrator himself, who has no wish to be effaced and who is not so distanced from any of his characters as the narrator of *A Mummer's Wife* was from Dick. It is comical, for instance, in the opening "play" scene when May plays the part of the King:

> So great was May's misreading of the character, that Alice could hardly realise that she was listening to her own piece. Instead of speaking the sentence, "My dear mother, I could not marry anyone I did not love; besides, am I not already wedded to music and poetry?" slowly, dreamily, May emphasised the words so jauntily, that they seemed to be poetic equivalents for wine and tobacco. (10)

The narrator also pokes fun at Mr. Adair, who, in trying to entertain May at dinner, mentions his farm buildings but, "When this subject was exhausted,... fell back upon his sawmill" (44). Such gentle social satire is reminiscent of Jane Austen, with whom Moore was deeply impressed. Another humourous passage which would have been worthy of Austen herself is the superb scene in which Olive is informed that the Marquis is engaged to her rival, Violet Scully:

> The famous Bertha, the terror of the debutantes, rushed to Brookfield, but she did not get there before the Brennans, and the result was a meeting of these families of girls in Mrs. Barton's drawing-room. Gladys was, however, the person chosen by God and herself to speak the powerful words:
>
> "Of course you have heard the news, Mrs. Barton?"
>
> "No," replied Mrs. Barton, a little nervously; "what is it?"
>
> "Oh, yes, what is it?" exclaimed Olive. "Anyone going to be married?"
>
> "Yes—can you guess?"
>
> "No; tell me quick . . . no, do tell me. Are you going to be married?"
>
> Had Olive been suddenly dowered with the wit of Congreve she could not have contrived an answer that would have shielded her better from the dart that Gladys was preparing to hurl. The girl winced; and divining the truth in a moment of inspiration, Mrs. Barton said:
>
> "Ah! I know; Lord Kilcarney is engaged to Violet Scully." (244-45)

Once again, it is the narrator's comment to the reader ("Had Olive been suddenly dowered with the wit of Congreve," et cetera) which creates the humour.

It is clear, then, that *A Drama in Muslin* is informed by a consciousness that is very different from the cool, detached reporter in *A Mummer's Wife*. If in that novel the narrator disappeared almost completely (apart from his "naturalistic" asides), in *A Drama in Muslin* he is very much in evidence.

Another facet of the narrator's omniscience is the way in which he relates to his main character. More than any other of Moore's heroines, Alice reflects the narrator's perceptions, and the novel is largely told from her point of view. She is a Victorian heroine, at least up to a point—unlike Kate Ede, Esther Waters or Evelyn Innes, she is young, innocent, upper class, and above all, good. But, like Austen's Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet or George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, she is also intelligent. Her thoughts about religion and politics are ample evidence of this. About religion she is skeptical, which becomes evident in the opening chapter when the convent girls enact the Annunication and birth of Christ:

> The humanity of the Bethlehem mystery held the world in the nineteenth, as it had done in the first century. To Alice alone did the representation appear absurd, grotesque; her clear mind forced her to deny God's presence in a drama, so obviously one of human invention. The stuffed ox and ass were irresistibly comic, but knowing that Cecelia's wistful brown eyes were fixed upon her, she bit her lips and avoided a smile. (14)

Later, when she confesses her lack of faith to Cecilia, she says,

> "Belief never touched me. I could never quite bring myself to credit that there was a Being far away, sitting behind a cloud, who kept his eye on all the different worlds, and looked after them just as a stationmaster looks after the arrival and departure of trains from some huge terminus. . . the charm of nature is broken when you introduce a ruling official." (60-61)

This, of course, echoes Moore's own religious skepticism; he once dryly remarked of Wordsworth's poetry that "One would have thought that flowers, especially wild flowers, might be freed from all moral obligations."[66] Alice's growing awareness of the Irish political situation, too, echoes the narrator's indignation. Shortly after she arrives home from the convent, Mrs. Barton says,

> "Just look at the country-people, how sour and wicked they look—don't they, Alice?"
> "Well, I don't know that they do, mamma," said Alice, who had already begun to see something wrong in each big house being surrounded by a hundred small ones, all working to keep it in sloth and luxury. (68)

Perhaps the best example of how completely Alice shares the narrator's perceptions of these issues, and one of the best scenes in the novel, is the Mass in the country chapel. It is described from Alice's point of view:

> Alice watched the ceremony of Mass, and the falseness of it jarred upon her terribly. The mumbled Latin, the by-play with the wine and water, the mumming of the uplifted hands, were so appallingly trivial, and, worse still, all realisation of the idea seemed impossible to the mind of the congregation. Passing by, without scorn, the belief that the white water the priest held above his head, in this lonely Irish chapel, was the Creator of the twenty millions of suns in the Milky Way, she mused on the faith as exhibited by those who came to worship, and that which would have, which must have, inspired them, were Christianity now, as it once was, a burning, a vital force in the world. (70)

Alice has an atheistically objective and inquiring mind, and the hypocrisy of the upper class appalls her:

> Looking round, what did she see? Here, at her elbow, were the gentry. How elegantly they prayed, with what refinement! Their social position was as manifest in their religion as in their homes, their language, their food. The delicate eyelids were closed from time to time;

> the long slim fingers held the gilt missals with the same well-bred grace as they would a fan; their thoughts would have passed from one to the other without embarrassment. Clearly they considered one the complement of the other. At the Elevation, the delicate necks were bowed, and, had lovers been whispering in their ears, greater modesty could not have been shown.
>
> They had come to be in the absolute presence of God, the Distributor of Eternal rewards and punishments—and yet they had taken advantage of this stupendous mystery to meet for the purpose of arranging the details of the ball. (70-71)

The peasants, on the other hand, seem just as bad in their own way:

> The peasantry filled the body of the church. They prayed coarsely, ignorantly, with the same brutality as they lived. Just behind Alice a man groaned. He cleared his throat with loud guffaws: she listened to hear the saliva fall: it splashed on the earthen floor. Further away a circle of dried and yellowing faces bespoke centuries of damp cabins, brutalising toil, occasional starvation. They moaned and sighed, a prey to the gross superstition of the moment. One man, bent double, beat a ragged shirt with a clenched fist; the women of forty, with cloaks drawn over their foreheads and trailing on the ground in long black folds, crouched until only the lean hard-worked hands that held the rosary were seen over the bench-rail. The young men stared arrogantly, wearied by the length of the service.
>
> They, too, had come to be in the absolute presence of God—the Distributor of Eternal rewards and punishments—and yet they had taken advantage of the occasion of this stupendous mystery to meet for the purpose of arranging a land meeting. (71)

This juxtaposition of the two groups displays a certain naturalistic impartiality similar to that in *A Mummer's Wife*. Neither class is to be blamed for its disregard of the professed meaning of the Mass, because they are both simply a result of social conditions. Only Alice is aware that the Mass is a "mummery."

As one might expect, a heroine with whom the narrator is so sympathetic is often revealed through her thoughts. Unlike Kate Ede, whose mental processes are obscured through the device of her dreaminess, Alice ponders at length about her situation. Near the beginning of the novel, her plight is brought home to her when she meets the unmarried, thirty-ish Brennan sisters:

> She had talked to these Brennans, seen how they lived, could guess what their past was, what their future must be. In that neat little house, their uneventful life dribbled away in maiden idleness; neither hope nor despair broke the cruel triviality of their days—and yet, was it their fault? No; for what could they do if no one would marry them?—a woman could do nothing without a husband. There is a reason for the existence of a pack-horse, but none for that of an unmarried woman. She can achieve nothing—she has no duty but, by blotting herself out, to shield herself from the attacks of ever-slandering friends. Alice had looked forward to a husband and a home as the certain accomplishment of years; now she saw that a woman, independently of her own will, may remain single. (58)

Apart from the first and last sentences, this consists of free indirect speech. What is instructive, however, is the switch to the present tense beginning with "There is a reason for the existence of a pack-horse. . . ." The voice of the narrator, who concurs in Alice's observations, "breaks through" for a moment, in fact, and speaks directly to the reader. Moore identifies strongly with his heroine in true Victorian fashion—naturalistic "objectivity" was obviously far from his mind—and explicitly as well as implicitly concurs in her musings. Alice is "no more than a plain girl, whom no man would care to marry, and who would have to live without any aim or object in life, an ever-increasing burden to her people, an object of derision to her acquaintances" (97). Her rebellious thoughts about this dilemma are vigorously supported by the narrator, whose voice often eclipses hers, even without lapsing into the present tense. The predominant "voice" in the following, for example, is initially Alice's:

> The scroll of the years was again unrolled before her—she saw herself growing old, amid bits of lace, faded flowers, and chattering chaperons. Those were the joys life had reserved for her; her pains would be the languors and irritations of endless idleness, and the sour sneering of girl acquaintances. She saw herself sitting amid them: the Brennans, the Duffys, the Honourable Miss Gores, and hosts of others, all waiting until someone would take pity and ask them to dance. (98)

The precise girlish details—the bits of lace, the chattering chaperons, the sneers and the waiting to be asked to dance—all spring convincingly from Alice's perception. The next few sentences, in which the perception has become more general, *may* be Alice's, but sound suspiciously like the narrator's:

> For this, and only this, the whole system of their education had been devised. They had been dressed out in a little French, a little music, a little watercolour-painting—for this, and only this: to snigger, to cajole, to chatter to any man who would condescend to listen to them, and to gladly marry any man who would undertake to keep them. For this, and only this, did the flower-adorned bosoms swell sweetly beneath the laced corsets; for this were the white smiles that greeted the partners approaching; for this were the red laughs that cajoled behind shadowy curtains; for this were the pretty feet advanced, with the flesh seen through the open work of the stocking; for this, and only this, was the pleading azure of the adoring eyes. (98-99)

It is unlikely that the Huysmansesque "red laughs and white smiles" form part of Alice's consciousness. Finally, the narrator's voice definitely becomes dominant, until Alice is abruptly recalled with a girlish exclamation reported in ordinary indirect speech:

> And from this awful mummery in muslin there was no escape. It would continue until the comedy became tragedy; until, with aching hearts and worn faces, they would be forced aside by the crush of the younger generation; and, looking aghast in the face of their five and thirty years, read there their sentence to die, as they had lived, ignorant of life and its meaning.
>
> Oh! never to know, born never to know, condemned never to know, the one joy in which gain is forgotten! was the cry that echoed through the bleakness of the girl's heart. (99)

The phrasing of this, particularly the "mummery in muslin," points to the prose-conscious Moore rather than the despairing Alice.

Such "taking over" of a character's free indirect speech by the narrator is not necessarily a flaw, although, as I have pointed out in Chapter II, Roy Pascal criticizes Flaubert for it.[67] In the stream-of-consciousness novel, for example, the voices of the narrator and the characters are blended so thoroughly that they become virtually indistinguishable. In *A Drama in Muslin*, however, this merging of the narrator's voice with that of the main character is simply an indication of his strong identification with her, which again is typically Victorian. Hillis Miller rightly remarks that "The basic mode of narration in Victorian fiction is neither dialogue nor internal monologue, but indirect discourse, that mode of language in which a man plays the role of a narrator who relives from within the thoughts and feelings of a character and registers these in his own language, or in a mixture of the character's language and his own language. . . . An exploitation of the fact that one can in language imagine oneself as having direct access to another mind makes Victorian fiction possible."[68]

Alice, in fact, is an interesting creation, especially for Moore. She is more intelligent than Kate or Esther, and voices the narrator's opinions at every turn, yet she is somehow not as real or even as likeable as either of them (although Arnold Bennett sees her as "entirely lovable").[69] Moore himself, who certainly recognized the importance of Alice's character to *A Drama in Muslin* ("Had I failed with Alice Barton I should have failed wholly"),[70] seemed to be aware of her lack of warmth:

> Perhaps in trying to do too much I did nothing. . . . To me . . . it is inconceivable that any critic worthy of the name should deem Kate Lennox a more satisfactory study of character than Alice Barton; and yet, on second thoughts, I do not know that this is so very inconceivable. We are all more naturalistic at heart than we would care to admit, and we sympathise more readily and more warmly with material than with intellectual natures.[71]

Peter Ure suggests that Alice is not as likeable as Moore's two other realistic heroines because "Esther acts nobly, as we think, Kate ignobly, and Alice merely sensibly."[72] I think, though, that Alice fails to engage the reader's imagination at least partly because she is *too* good; like certain of George Eliot's heroines (Dinah in *Adam Bede*, for example), she is occasionally presented in a piously altruistic light, which does not accord well with her intelligence or her skepticism.

We are often reminded of her "supreme unselfishness" (66) and "the invincible goodness of her nature" (140), and we are told that "a sense of the moral degradation, to which she had been so cruelly subjected, came upon her like the foul odours of a dirty kitchen issuing through a grating" (143). Like many pure Victorian heroines before her, she revels in "the lofty charms of Sir Walter Scott's novels" (53). Indeed, the narrator's presentation of Alice is resonant with echoes of Victorian sweetness and light. We read that "the sweet girl by her side was her sister—the sister she had known since babyhood" (35), and that she regards motherhood as a "sweet office" (100). Likewise, the following description of Alice before she becomes engaged to Dr. Reed is no less sentimental than Dickens himself would have made it:

> As there are often in a violet sky vanishing touches of delicate blue so pleasantly suggestive of sunshine that they are, as it were, thoughts of happiness and pleasure, a sweet humming joy fluttered down upon her heart like wings upon a nest that was soon to grow alive with fledglings. In that moment Alice knew she was to be a wife. A soft voice cooed deliciously about her heart, but she strove not to listen. (303)

How uncharacteristic of the George Moore of *A Mummer's Wife*, whose narrator systematically deflated Kate's romantic notions of a "happily ever after" marriage! It is somewhat astonishing to hear the later author of *Confessions* saying in all seriousness at the end of *A Drama in Muslin* that

> Human greatness at Ashbourne Crescent is as good as it be, and it teems with all the delights of home and habit, delights that alone are assuaging, and to which even the

> most ardent spirits turn in the end and accept humbly and with admiration and love. (326)

Thus we can see that this narrator—a theorizing, moralizing, partisan narrator—presides over the whole novel from beginning to end. His direct comments to the reader and his not-so-direct comments couched in Alice's free indirect speech both leave little doubt about the "moral" of the story. This moral, an interesting blend of Victorian and modern elements, can best be investigated by a closer look at the events of the novel.

3. The Victorian Plot

It is immediately apparent that *A Drama in Muslin* is unequivocally divided into "good" and "bad" elements. The "good" characters are appropriately rewarded, and the "bad" are punished; Alice achieves a happy marriage, while Mrs. Barton's schemes end in ruin (Olive remains an old maid). Moore was later to regard this sharp division as a flaw in the novel: "Nowhere is there a half tint . . .; it is a violently painted picture in flake white and blue black."[73] Perhaps he is right, to some extent; Alice, as I have noted, suffers from a lack of warmth as a result of being too "good." I would now like to look at the "bad" characters, the chief of whom is Mrs. Barton.

The narrator describes her fully on her first appearance. Like that of many characters in Victorian novels, "Mrs. Barton's figure was singularly in keeping with her moral character":

> Both were elegant, refined, supple. When she walked, no movement of her limbs was ever visible; she glided when she crossed a room; she seemed by preference to avoid the middle of the floor, and to pass as close to the wall as possible. She, therefore, suggested the idea of one who had worked her way through life by means of numberless bye-paths, all lying a little to the left of the main road along which the torrent of men and women poured, and who had been known to them only at intervals as she passed furtively down the end of a vista, or hurriedly crossed an unexpected glade.
>
> The bent shoulders hinted at a capacity for stooping under awkward branches and passing through difficult places. There was about Mrs. Barton's whole person an air of falseness, as indescribable as it was bewitching.
>
> The waves of her white hands, with which she accompanied all her pretty speeches, seduced, if they did not deceive you. Her artificiality was her charm. (23)

These white hands, which function as a "leitmotif" in the novel, are the most distinctive thing about Mrs. Barton. They operate almost independently of her and symbolize her artificiality. They are sometimes "laid like china ornaments in her lap," but usually they are used to wave away anything unpleasant. Mrs. Barton is in fact similar in some ways to Mrs. Bentham in *A Modern Lover*, except that in that novel—one of Moore's "aesthetic" novels—Mrs. Bentham is viewed sympathetically. The latter's fault is not having a lover, but being jealous when he leaves her for someone else. It is unclear whether the aged Lord Dungory is actually Mrs. Barton's lover, but certainly their liaison is viewed with disgust by both Alice and the narrator. The following is a typical scene:

> The old lord was seated in the dining-room, in an armchair which Mrs. Barton had drawn up to the window so that he might enjoy the air. She had placed a table by his side, and with many little cajoleries, was pouring him out a

> glass of sherry, and complimenting him, with quite a flutter of words, on his good looks and general appearance. He bowed ceremoniously, smiled urbanely, and Alice, as she entered the room, heard him say: *"Quand on aime on est toujours bien portant."*
>
> She stopped abruptly, and Mrs. Barton, who already suspected her of secret criticism, whispered, as she glided across the room:
>
> "Now, you awkward girl, don't stand there looking foolish; go and talk to Milord and learn to make yourself agreeable." (36)

Both Lord Dungory and Mrs. Barton specialize in flirtation and flattery, and together they make a lasting impression on both Olive and Alice when the two girls first arrive home from the convent:

> It was a long time before she could forget Olive's blond, cameo-like profile seen leaning over the old beau's fat shoulder. Mrs. Barton laughed and laughed again, declaring the while that it was *la grâce et la beauté réunies*. . . . At last they bumped against Milord, and shot the old man and his fair burden on to the nearest sofa . . . the dancing was continued till the carriage came up the gravel-sweep to fetch Milord away. This was generally about half-past eleven, and, as he muffled himself up in overcoats, the girls were told to cram his pockets with cigarettes and bonbons. (29)

Such scenes are reminiscent of similar events in Zola's *Pot-Bouille*, one of the sources proposed by Milton Chaikin for *A Drama in Muslin*. In the following episode, for example, Hortense and Berthe, encouraged by their avaricious mother, attempt to cajole their Uncle Bachelard into giving them twenty francs:

> Hortense et Berthe, de nouveau, se jetèrent sur l'oncle, sans retenue. L'envie des vingt francs, que leur bonne éducation contenait, finissait par les enrager; et elles lâchaient tout. L'une, à deux mains, visitait les poches

> du gilet, tandis que la'autre enfonçait les doigts jusqu'au poignet dans les poches de la redingote. Cependant, l'oncle, renversé, luttait encore; mais le rire le prenait, un rire coupé des hoquets de l'ivresse. . . .
>
> Et Berthe, résolue, fouilla dans une des poches du pantalon. Leurs mains frémissaient, toutes deux devenaient brutales, elles auraient giflé l'oncle. Mais Berthe eut une exclamation de victoire: elle ramenait du fond de la poche une poignée de monnaie, qu'elle éparpilla sur une assiette; et là, parmi un tas de gros sous et quelques pièces blanches, il y avait une pièce de vingt francs.[74]

In Zola's novel, however, the vulgarity of such manoeuvres is decidedly in the foreground; if Moore did use it as a source, simply by removing the theme from the lower to the upper class he has removed his novel from a naturalistic account to a Victorian "society" novel.

Mrs. Barton's charming manners assure the difference between her and the gross Madame Josserand, but both women manipulate men avariciously and unmercifully. We are given the impression that Mrs. Barton flirts with Lord Dungory, for instance, not because of any real feeling she has for him, but because flirtation is second nature to her and because of the money he provides her with. Appropriate "mechanical" imagery is frequently used to describe Mrs. Barton, and it is extremely effective:

> Moving, as if she were on wheels, towards her daughter, she whispered: "Do as I tell you, run upstairs at once, and get your music; make yourself useful." (28)
>
> The glass of sherry, the little table, the coaxing laughs, and the compliments would be all prepared and served out with automatic precision. (52)

> From the box-seat of a drag the white hands were waved, the cajoling laugh was set going. (133)

Mrs. Barton is in fact the only unequivocally "bad" character in the book, and "her artificiality is her charm." It is obvious, therefore, that while the style of *A Drama in Muslin* is highly derivative of Huysmans, its theme certainly is not. The insidious charm of artificiality, so admired by Des Esseintes, is in Mrs. Barton represented as deplorable. W. C. Frierson would probably argue that Moore himself really believed nothing of the sort,[75] but that is hardly important in assessing the novel. Mrs. Barton's conniving artificial nature epitomizes the women who run the marriage-market, and is convincingly corrupt. Both Alice's innocence and Mrs. Barton's falsity are revealed in the following exchange, which takes place when Alice tells her mother that people are talking about Olive and Captain Hibbert:

> "But why do you come telling me these stories?" she said.
>
> "Why, mamma," said Alice, astonished at the question, "because I thought it right to do so."
>
> The word "right" was unpleasant; but, recovering her temper, which for years before had never failed her, Mrs. Barton returned to her sweet little flattering manners.
>
> "Of course, of course, my dear girl." (116)

Alice's "astonishment" here seems genuine enough, and the scene constitutes a good instance of a case in which she seems to be not as "likeable" as she is "good." Mrs. Barton, of course, is portrayed as neither good nor likeable. Later, the omniscient narrator admits us to her consciousness when she is considering what to do about the captain, and her thoughts are far from admirable:

> Things must be managed easily, gently. Olive must be talked to, how far her heart was engaged in the matter must be found out, and she must be made to see the folly, the madness of risking her chance of winning a coronet for the sake of a beggarly five-hundred-a-year captain. And, good heavens! the chaperons: what would they say of her, Mrs. Barton, were such a thing to occur? Mrs. Barton turned from the thought in horror; and then, out of the soul of the old coquette, arose, full-fledged the chaperon, the satellite whose light and glory is dependent on that of the fixed star around which she invitingly revolves. (119)

All of this but the last sentence is free indirect speech; we get "inside" Mrs. Barton, but we do not like what we find there. She habitually thinks of Alice, for example, as a nuisance:

> She foresaw the trouble this plain girl would be to chaperon. The annoyance of having to find her partners would be great, and to have her dragging after her all through the Castle season would be intolerable. And all these airs of virtue, and injured innocence, how insupportable they were! Alice, as far as Mrs. Barton could see, was fit for nothing. . . . Everything was decidedly going wrong; and to be annoyed by that gawk of a girl in a time like the present, was unbearable. (132, 135)

The cruelty of her dismissal of Alice as "this plain girl" and "that gawk of a girl" is obvious; what Mrs. Barton does to the vapid, beautiful Olive, though, is far worse. She encourages her to "amuse herself" with the young, handsome Captain Hibbert before they go to Dublin for the season, and Olive inconveniently falls in love with him. The following dialogue indicates the type of coercion she uses to convince Olive to give him up:

> "Officers are all very well to laugh, talk, and flirt with—*pour passer le temps*—but I could not allow you to throw yourself away on the first man you meet. You will meet hundreds of others quite as handsome and as nice at the Castle."
>
> "I never could care for anyone else."
>
> "Wait until you have seen the others. Besides what do you want? to be engaged to him? And I should like to know what is the use of my taking an engaged girl up to the Castle? No one would look at you. . . ."
>
> "Of course, if you like to see Violet become a marchioness, right under your nose, you can do so."
>
> "But what do you want me to do?" exclaimed the coronet-dazzled girl.
>
> "Merely to think no more of Captain Hibbert. . . . What I tell you to do is right; and if you see nobody at the Castle that you like better—well, then it will be time enough. I want you to be, at least, the beauty of one season."
>
> This argument again turned the scales. Olive laughed, but her laugh was full of the nervous excitement from which she suffered. (138-39)

What follows is an undignified attempt to "catch" the Marquis, in which Mrs. Barton uses every means at her disposal—including direct financial bribery—to get him interested in Olive. Her approach, as the narrator points out, is simply that of the courtesan. Olive's attempts at flirtation fail, however, because "Mrs. Barton did not see that the weapons which had proved so deadly in her hands were worthless and ineffectual in her daughter's" (205). The narrator's description of these attempts would be amusing, if they were not so bitter.

> Mrs. Barton's formula for receiving the marquis never varied. If he arrived early he found Olive waiting to receive him in the drawing-room. She was always prepared with a buttonhole, which she insisted on arranging and pinning into his coat. Then allusion was made to the forget-me-nots that the bouquet was sure to contain; and laughing vacantly—for laughter with Olive took the place of conversation—she fled through the rooms, encouraging him to pursue her. (208)

Olive is vain and shallow, and the narrator wastes little sympathy on her, but the use Mrs. Barton makes of her is clearly shameful. After the shattering news that the marquis is going to marry Violet, the following exchange takes place:

> "I'm disgraced; he's going to marry Violet, and I shall not be a marchioness after all."
>
> "If my beautiful darling likes she can be a duchess," replied Mrs. Barton with a silvery laugh.
>
> "I don't understand, mamma."
>
> "I mean that we are not entirely dependent on that wretched little marquis with his encumbered property; if he was fool enough to let himself be entrapped by that designing little beast, Violet Scully, so much the worse for him; we shall get someone far grander than he. It is never wise for a girl to settle herself off the first season she comes out."
>
> "It is all very well to say that now, but you made me break off with dear Edward, who was ever so nice, and loved me dearly."
>
> Mrs. Barton winced, but she answered almost immediately, "My dear, we shall get someone a great deal grander than that wretched marquis. There will be a whole crowd of English dukes and earls at the Castle next year; men who haven't a mortgage on their property, and who will all fight for the hand of my beautiful Olive. Mr. Harding, Alice's friend, will put your portrait into one of the Society papers as the Galway beauty, and then next year you may be her Grace."
>
> "And how will they do my portrait, mamma?"
>
> "I think you look best, darling, with your hair done up on the top of your head, in the French fashion." (246)

Olive is a victim, like many of the other "muslin martyrs," and when she finally attempts to elope with Captain Hibbert the reader is not surprised.

The real evil in the novel, of course, is not Mrs. Barton but the system she represents, the "marriage-market" in which only the very lucky are able to sell themselves to a man who will marry them. The misfortunes that befall all of the young ladies in the novel apart from Violet and the resourceful Alice stem from this system of barter. The coarse Mrs. Gould's advice ("young girls . . . should be glad to have those who will take them. If they can't make a good marriage let them make a bad marriage; for . . . it is far better to be minding your own children than your sister's or your brothers's children" [80]) is echoed in Mrs. Barton's speech to her daughters:

> "I would sooner have the worst husband in the world than no husband." Then settling herself like a pleader who has come to the incisive point of his argument, she continued: "A woman is absolutely nothing without a husband: if she does not wish to pass for a failure she must get a husband: and upon this all her ideas should be set. . . . Keep on trying, that is my advice to all young ladies: try to make yourselves agreeable, try to learn how to amuse men. Flatter them; that is the great secret; nineteen out of twenty will believe you, and the one that doesn't can't but think it delightful. Don't waste your time thinking of your books, your painting, your accomplishments; if you were Jane Austens, George Eliots, and Rosa Bonheurs, it would be of no use if you weren't married. A husband is better than talent, better even than fortune—without a husband a woman is nothing; with a husband she may rise to any height. Marriage gives a girl liberty, gives her admiration, gives her success; a woman's whole position depends upon it." (137)

Again, this is reminiscent of Madame Josserand's desperation to marry off her daughters in *Pot-Bouille*, and the intolerable indignity of such an attitude is reinforced by the "hunt" imagery which the narrator constantly uses to describe it. Mrs. Barton "baits the hook" (135) and "smears the hook" (235), and the Marquis is "hunted" (160) and occasionally "breaks cover" (157). Moore's indignation is sometimes extreme, as the metaphor in the following passage indicates:

> Eye, ear, and nostril were open, and in the quivering ardour of the chase they scattered through the covers of Cork Hill and Merrion Square, passing from one to the other, by means of sharp yelps and barkings, every indication of the trail that came across their way. Sometimes hearkening to a voice they had confidence in, they would rally at a single point, and then an old b----, her nose in the air, her capstrings hanging lugubriously on either side of her weatherbeaten cheeks, would utter a deep and prolonged baying; then a little further on the scent was recovered, and, with sterns wagging and bristles erect, they hunted the quarry vigorously. Every moment he was expected to break—fear was even expressed that he might end by being chopped. (209)

The conflict in *A Drama in Muslin* is thus fairly straightforward. Alice, the "good" sympathetic heroine, is confronted with a society in which marriage is necessary but almost impossible. The way in which she (in contrast to the other "martyrs") handles this dilemma constitutes the main plot of the "drama in muslin." This preoccupation with love and marriage and the division into good and bad characters are characteristically Victorian, but other elements in the novel—such as the frankness with which the young women's sexual desires are described, and the feminism which informs the outcome of the events—definitely are not, and I would now like to examine these "modern" overtones.

According to Jenni Calder, Gissing's Helen, the heroine of *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), is "probably the first well-bred woman in nineteenth-century fiction to admit openly her sexuality."[76] The "particularly striking moment" in which she does this is as follows:

she says to her fiancé, "Have I not passions like your own, the thwarting of which causes me pangs as keen as those you suffer from?"[77] The distance Moore had come five years later was considerable. We are told that Alice is "a healthy-bodied girl, every organ in her functioned admirably, and the blood flowed as warm in her as in her beautiful sister" (50), and that "thoughts that scorched, desires she could not control, persecuted her, and so persistently that, at last, they seemed part and parcel of her habitual thought; and she was shaken with sudden and quick revulsions of feeling. Was she never to know? Was this life of weak idleness to continue for ever?" (97) Certainly none of George Eliot's or Hardy's heroines ever longs for physical love quite so explicitly as Alice, who,

> her brain throbbing with terrors as intimate and intense as the pulsing of her blood, that night, straight and stark, her head buried in the pillow, asked herself if she were not proper for a husband's love; her limbs, were they not as strong and healthy, if not as fair as her sister's? "Yes! yes!" and the darkness answered again "Yes;" but looking through the length of years, in spite of all, she saw herself for ever sleeping in celibacy. (103)

Six years later, Hardy's milkmaids in *Tess* are also victims of sexual longing:

> The air of the sleeping-chamber seemed to palpitate with the hopeless passion of the girls. They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law—an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired. The incident of the day had fanned the flame that was burning the inside of their hearts out, and the torture was almost more than they could endure. The differences which distinguished them as individuals

> were abstracted by this passion, and each was but portion of one organism called sex. . . . They tossed and turned on their little beds, and the cheese-wring dripped monotonously downstairs.[78]

There is nothing in this passage that is quite so explicit as Alice's fear of "sleeping in celibacy"; also, although both passages stress the "suffering" of unfulfilled desire, Hardy distances his somewhat by making it less personal (the girls' suffering is general rather than individual, and it is attributed to an impersonal "Nature's law").

Either of these passages, however, would undoubtedly have brought "a blush to the cheek of the young person," and in this respect they are symptomatic of the changes that were taking place in the position of women in society and in the English novel in the last part of the nineteenth century. Such frankness was partly a reflection of the influence of French naturalism, which in some respects at least was being slowly accepted by English writers, and partly a reflection of the doubts that were being raised about the equation of innocence with ignorance, especially in young women. In 1894, in fact, there was a symposium[79] (in which fourteen well-known people took part) on the sex education of females, which largely came to the same conclusions Moore had reached nine years earlier in *Literature at Nurse* (1885):

> The British mamma is determined that her daughter shall know nothing of life until she is married; at all events, that if she should learn anything, there should be no proof of her knowledge lying about the place—a book would be a proof; consequently the English novel is made so that it will fit in with the "Maiden's Prayer". . . . But let me not be misunderstood. I would not have it supposed that I am of opinion that literature can be glorified in the

> Temples of Venus. Were the freedom of speech I ask for to lead to this, we should have done no more than to have substituted one evil for another. There is a middle course, and I think it is this—to write as grown-up men and women talk of life's passions and duties. On one hand there must be no giggling over stories whispered in the corners of rooms; on the other, there must be no mock moral squeamishness about speaking of vice. We must . . . give up once and for ever asking that most silly of all silly questions, "Can my daughter of eighteen read this book?"[80]

Moore put these theories into practice in *A Drama in Muslin*: "Le Printemps" hanging in Alice's and Olive's bedroom is obviously analagous to the "Maiden's Prayer," and the novel not only contains material that would "educate" a young woman of eighteen, it is also *about* a young woman of eighteen.

"Alice Barton," sayd Lloyd Fernano, "embodies Moore's views of the proper place of the sex in its relation to emancipationist ideas."[81] This is true—in "*Defensio*" Moore roundly decries the Victorian love-novel ("Novelists seem to me to linger still in the gardens of paradise, the love story of to-day is that of our first parents—*you are beautiful, I am beautiful, let's fling ourselves into each other's arms, and adore each other*")[82]—and I would now like to take a closer look at Alice's situation.

First of all, it is interesting (and somewhat amusing) that Moore, who remarks in *Confessions* that while French and English men are very different, French and English women are "psychologically very similar; the standpoint from which they see life is the same, the same thoughts interest and amuse them,"[83] appears to have learned something quite new about women in doing his research for the character of Alice:

> Over and over again I pulled these women to pieces like toys, and strove to build something of my own out of the pile of virtues and vices that lay before me. But similar, I might say identical, though they seemed to be at first sight, the differences in each organism was astonishing when they were examined closely.[84]

As we have already seen, Alice is a plain girl. This is no accident, and represents a theory of physiognomy that is emphasized throughout *A Drama in Muslin*.

> Once celibacy and the marriage mart had been determined on as the principal theme, it became clear that the heroine must be one who refused to join in the ignoble struggle. . . . That this girl might be beautiful was possible enough; but my experience had taught me that this girl is not beautiful usually. . . . I believe that the interpretation of this physiological fact lies in the physiological truth, that, wherever true beauty of line exists, strength of character will be found to be lacking. Question. What is the fate of a plain girl in England? Answer. She is sacrificed to her pretty sister.[85]

"True beauty of line," as I have shown, exists in Olive, who is accordingly "lacking" in strength of character. At still further extremes on this physical/psychological scale are May Gould and Cecilia Cullen, who function as the foils against which Alice's struggle is enacted. ("And to enforce the character of Alice Barton," says Moore, "I placed on either side of her May Gould and Lady Cecilia Cullen.")[86] May looks like an excessively sensual woman, and she turns out to be one:

> There is always a close and intimate, though not always an obvious analogy, between our mental and physical characteristics. . . . The soft, the melting the almost fluid eyes, the bosom large and just a little falling, the full hips, the absence of any marked point or line, the rolling roundness of every part of the body definitely announced a want of fixed principle, and a somewhat gross and sensual temperament. . . . (167)

Similarly, Cecilia's physical deformity is indicative of her spiritual deformity:

> You can see the high shoulders; the chin and neck how curiously advanced. But little is seen but the eyes! the eyes of the deformed, deep, dreamy depths of brown, luminous with a strange weariness, that we who are normal, straight, and strong, can neither feel nor understand. (226)

Cecilia, in fact, is an unusual character in several respects. First of all, her friendship with Alice, while it lacks the "physical love" that is a prerequisite for Janet Todd's definition of a lesbian relationship,[87] definitely has lesbian overtones: "Lover was never more anxious to meet mistress than this little deformed girl to see her friend" (53); "'Now Alice,' said Cecilia, . . . and there was something of the passion of the lover in her voice. . . ." (62). Not surprisingly, she dislikes men with a rabid intensity. She writes to Alice,

> I have seen (but it was not true though it seemed so clear; visions are not always true) this man kissing you! Oh! Alice, let me warn you, let me beg of you to think well before you abandon yourself to a man's power, to a man's love. It is a vile and degrading thing. How women can endure it I don't know; the thought fills me with horror. Women are pure, men are obscene animals. Their love is our degradation. Love! a nice name they give it. How can a sentiment that is merely a gratification of the lowest passions be love? And that is all they seek; I know it; in their heart of hearts, they despise us. . . . All their tender little words and attentions are but lust in disguise. I hate them! I could whip, I could beat, I would torture them; and when I had done my worst I should not have done enough to punish them for the wrongs they have done to my sex. (184-85)

Combined with this hatred of men is a religious hysteria, about which the narrator displays a shrewd understanding:

> Alice looked at her friend; . . . But Cecilia did not see her; the prominent eyes of the mystic were veiled with strange glamour, and, with divine *gourmandise*, she savoured the ineffable sweetness of the vision, and as the sensuality of her nature revolted against the warmth of a lover's kiss, it yielded to the cold aisle made lovely with the white body of God set in gold above the distant altar. (60)

Such a neurotic personality is the hallmark of a certain kind of late nineteenth-century heroine; Hardy's Sue is probably the best known of them.[88] Cecilia's submersion of sexual in religious passion was a subject that Moore was fascinated with. It shows up in much of his later work, such as *Evelyn Innes*, *Sister Teresa* and most of the short stories in *Celibates*, *In Single Strictness*, *Celibate Lives* and *The Untilled Field*. Unmarried, Irish and ex-Roman Catholic as he was, it is not surprising that Moore (like Joyce) was preoccupied with religion and sexual loneliness, and his insights are penetrating, considering that he was writing twenty years before Freud's works were published in England. He sees, for instance, that "the natural wants of love have become a nervous erethism in the struggle that a surplus population of more than two million women have created" (195). Cecilia is a convincing zealot; the only flaw in her presentation is that her ravings are too lengthy. Chapter 6 of Book III consists entirely of her religious rhapsodies, and together with Chapter 5 of Book II (which consists largely of Lord Kilcarny's rhapsodies about Violet) constitute the most tedious parts of the novel.

Perhaps more importantly, Moore's obvious delight in his portrayal of Cecilia's "spiritual malady" (which is certainly "exotic" and "over-subtle") constitutes evidence that he had not, after all, completely misunderstood Huysmans' decadence. In his portrayal of Cecilia he admittedly "allowed" himself to explore a symbolist style:

> Ugliness is prosaic, but the monstrous is lyrical. I, therefore, willingly and with forethought, laid aside the objective treatment and adopted a subjective one; in other words, I took the idea and, regardless of the expression it would find in nature, sang it through several pages in language the least naturalistic I could devise. But of the idea—horror of sex—which so far as I know was never presented before, none took the least notice.[89]

The "subjective treatment" of the idea that is "sung" in "language the least naturalistic" all echo Huysmans' symbolic style, and in a more convincing fashion than the insipid male heroes of Moore's later aesthetic novels. Cecilia has an intensity that both John Norton and Mike Fletcher, for example, signally lack; this, I think, lends seriousness and depth to her portrayal and makes it more than just superficially decadent.

Alice manages to avoid the sexual extremes of both May and Cecilia, and the way in which she does this reveals much of Moore's moral in *A Drama in Muslin*. She represents, according to Moore, "the personal conscience striving against the communal."[90] Her struggle, like that of Gissing's odd women, Wells' Anne Veronica and Ibsen's Nora Helmer, is to define her place as a woman in society which regards women as mere commodities. Moore was understandably surprised, in fact, that people failed to recognize the theme of the novel as similar to that of

A Doll's House, which Moore did not read until he was almost finished writing *A Drama in Muslin* and which was not produced in England until 1889.[91] Alice, in fact, as Moore was later to recognize, was a more suitable type of woman than Ibsen's Nora Helmer to defy successfully the traditional notions of women and marriage ("In the space of three minutes," says Moore, "Nora, who has been her husband's sensual toy, and has taken pleasure in being that, and only that, leaves her husband and children . . . for school-books").[92] Alice, on the other hand, displays a keen intelligence and inquiring mind *before* she opts out of the marriage-market; in creating her character, Moore reports that "I at last saw in the form of a woman: atheism, an austere sense of duty, a somewhat sensual nature, but one entirely under control, a nature intensely self-conscious, one given to constant introspection, but capable, if needs be, of making great sacrifices for another, and yet one that would not miss an opportunity of making the best terms with life. . . . Alice Barton seems to me the most modern of women."[93]

This last remark, that Alice is "the most modern of women," is repeated many times in Moore's analysis of the novel. ("It seems strange to me, infinitely strange, putting aside all questions of success or failure, that none took note of my ambitious attempt, that none recognized that my aim had been to portray in Alice Barton the type of the woman that to-day, in England, stands in the van of modern womanhood.")[94] Alice's "modernism" consists in her writing, which enables her to feel that she is "neither a doll nor a victim" (270). The word "doll" has frequently been used in literature to symbolize the passivity of the female condition; in addition to Ibsen's "doll," Mrs. Garth in *Middlemarch* makes a scathing reference to a "useless doll,"[95] and Susan Siefert mentions "Thackeray's 'Amelia doll'—the heroine who was kind, gentle, unassertive, unaspiring and intellectually moribund."[96] Siefert's study (*The Dilemma of the Talented Heroine*, 1977), in fact, helps to "place" Alice among the heroines of her century. The five talented heroines Siefert examines—Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke—are all "talented." This means that they have a lack of conventional accomplishments, such as needlework, music and painting, but they do have

> a combination of intellectual acuity, moral sensitivity and aspiration. . . . As distinct from accomplishment, talent is an interior quality, intimately related to the heroines' self-images and the possession of this quality involves the talented heroine in a complex dilemma. Because of her intellectual acuity, she often sees more and more deeply than others do; sometimes she perceives meanings which elude the conventional women, sometimes her world view is so different that she misses what is perfectly apparent to others. Her moral sensitivity is most often a source of pain to her. . . .[97]

Obviously, Alice shares with these heroines their "talent"; what distinguishes her from them, and makes her a more "modern" heroine, is her work. Apart from Jane Eyre, who is forced to become a governess for a time, none of Siefert's talented heroines actually support themselves through their work. Their "talent" usually exhibits itself largely through some intangible achievement such as the acquisition of moral awareness. Like the "bluestocking" novels of the century, these novels entertained the idea of women as intelligent beings who might rebel against convention in some way, but not the idea of women as the professional equals of men.

A Drama in Muslin represents a link, in fact, between the more traditional Victorian novel boasting a talented heroine and the "New Woman" novels of the 1890's, which deal in a radical way with issues related to women, sex and marriage as an institution. Feminist critics, such as A. R. Cunningham, divide these novels into two groups:

> The first, and less radical [group], which later became known as the "purity school" was typified by Grant Allen and his "hill-top" label. . . . For [such a heroine] a monogamous relationship was still the ideal, but her intelligence and independence were used to dispel the hypocrisy which surrounded the Victorian concept of marriage. Not all the writers of this type of novel rejected legal marriage altogether, but all aimed for a frankness and honesty in relationships between the sexes which struck terror among conventionally-minded parents anxious to preserve the ideal of marketable innocence in their daughters. The second type presented a heroine more akin to that described by Hardy's German critic, "the slight, pale, 'bachelor' girl—the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves." The writers of this type of New Woman novel were on the whole more radical in their treatment of sexuality, more aware of the sexual motivation of women. They too expressed doubts about the marriage contract, but were more interested in the psychological problems arising from attempts at emancipation and less committed to the ideal of a monogamous relationship.[98]

Alice not only precedes the more radical "New Woman" heroines of Grant Allen, Mona Caird, Menie Muriel Dowie, George Egerton, Sarah Grand and Iota; she also finds much more practicable solutions to her problems, and succeeds where her later counterparts generally fail. She finds independence in her writing, for example, but she is no Rhoda Nunn who is able to find all of her satisfaction in a career. "A puritan . . . I am writing of," said Moore, "but not a sexless puritan, and if women cannot win their freedom without leaving their sex behind they had better remain slaves, for a slave with his sex is better than a free eunuch. . . ."[99]

Finally Alice marries the middle-class Dr. Reed. Paul Sporn regards this as "proof of Frierson's argument that, in order to be a popular novelist, Moore compromised with Victorian political and moral attitudes,"[100] and perhaps it is. Sporn is also convinced that "Alice is not passionately in love with Reed,"[101] but I am not so sure. The most explicit insight into Alice's feelings for him are found in the "cooing doves" passage I quoted earlier, which was highly suggestive of romance, and the following:

> With the coming of her breath her bosom heaved, and as her dreams floated delicately before her, she thought of the doctor's eyes. They were grey, and her memory seemed filled with their bright quick glances. The rest of his face was a little vague to her. She had forgotten, or rather she had never thoroughly understood, that he was a short, thick-set, middle-aged man, that he wore mutton-chop whiskers and that his lips were overhung by a long dark mustache. His manners were those of an unpolished and somewhat commonplace man. But while she thought of his grey eyes her heart was thrilled with gladness, and as she dreamed of his lonely life of labour and his ultimate hopes of success, all her old sorrows and fears seemed to have evaporated like chilly mists. (295)

This seems happy enough so far, but the remainder of the paragraph introduces an ambivalence:

> Then suddenly and with the unexpectedness of an apparition the question presented itself, did she like him better than

> Harding? Alice shrank from the unpleasantness of the thought, nor did she force herself to answer it; but perhaps to escape from it, and there was a touch of cowardice in the acts, she busied herself with attending to her sister's wants. (295)

Moore himself is fairly non-committal on the point: "Alice Barton and Dr. Reed marry because they suit each other; her ideal is a possible not an impossible one, and she attains it in a ten-roomed house in Notting Hill;—and is not a possible, rather than an impossible, ideal, the landmark which divides the modern from the heroic ages?"[102] Alice's solution to her problem is at least partly an expedient one; but that is not to say that it is an unhappy one.

In any case, the feminism in *A Drama in Muslin* is considerably modified in comparison to that of the "New Woman" novels. Alice sees marriage as a union of equals:

> What she saw was an ideal couple, journeying with a firm step through life, sharing burdens and sorrows, that were made lighter by the sharing. Fragments of history came back to her; and, in a confused and disjointed way, she realised how men have bought women, imprisoned women, kept women as a sort of common property; but that throughout the ages they have never been considered as anything more than objects of luxury or necessity. "How then," she asked passionately, "can we be really noble and pure, while we are still decked out in innocence, virtue, and belief as ephemeral as the muslins we wear? Until we are free to think, until we are their sisters in thought, we cannot hope to become the companions, the friends, the supports of men." (101)

Later, she tells Dr. Reed that she can make two hundred pounds a year through her writing, and that she expects them to bear life's burden, "not quite equally, but as nearly as Nature will allow" (311). The narrator himself (in the guise of Alice's free indirect speech) expresses the view that

> There are psychological reasons that to-day more than ever impel women to shrink from the intellectual monotony of their sex, and to view with increasing admiration the free, the vigorous intelligence of the male. For as the gates of the harem are being broken down, and the gloom of the female mind clears, and grows keenly alive to the sensations and ideas of modern life, it becomes axiomatically sure that Woman brings a loftier reverence to the shrine of Man than she has done in any past age, seeing, as she now does, in him the incarnation of the freedom of which she is vaguely conscious and which she is perceptibly acquiring. (195)

This all sounds unequivocally feminist; but the narrator goes on to discuss the "under-current" of "hatred and revolt" that causes modern women to "forget the immutability of the laws of life, and with virulent virtue and protest condemn love . . . and proclaim a higher mission for woman than to be the mother of man" (196)! The marriage market is bad, in other words, but marriage itself is good. A feminist novel *A Drama in Muslin* is, but a "marriage" or "problem" novel it is not.

Despite this modification of its feminist theme, *A Drama in Muslin* was considerably more modern in its outlook than many novels of its day. Its happily-ever-after ending, one of its obvious Victorian features, is really the only part of it that could be regarded as a "sop" to conventional morality. Like many a Victorian heroine before her, Alice leaves her unhappy home amid showers of rain and tears to join her capable, good-hearted husband. The wedding ceremony itself, however, is presented in an unsentimental way. It exhibits exactly the attitude Sue and Jude were lacking each time they attempted to get married:

> What did it matter to them what absurd usages the place they were in was put to?—they, at least, were only making use of it as they might of any other public office; the police station, where inquiries are made concerning parcels left in cabs; the Commissioner before whom an affidavit is made. And it served its purpose as well as any of the others did theirs. The priest joined their hands, Edward put the ring on Alice's finger, and the usual prayers did no harm if they did no good; and having signed their names in the register and bid good-bye to the Miss Brennans, they got into the carriage, man and wife. . . . (321)

Two years later, Alice makes the following appearance:

> It is now eleven o'clock in the morning. Alice enters her drawing-room. You see her: a tall, spare woman with kind eyes, who carries her arms stiffly. She has just finished her housekeeping, she puts down her basket of keys, and with all the beautiful movement of the young mother she takes up the crawling mass of white frock, kisses her son and settles his blue sash. And when she has talked to him for a few minutes she rings the bell for nurse: then she sits down to write. (327-28)

At first glance, this seems the usual sentimental dénouement: the young wife, now a mother, making a final contented appearance at the very end of the novel. But there are certain important differences. Alice is still plain ("a tall, spare woman . . . who carries her arms stiffly") and, as in the description of her lying in bed in the first part of the novel, her beauty is seen in her intelligence (she has "kind eyes" and "sits down to write") and in action (she has finished her housekeeping, puts down her keys, takes up her son, kisses him and talks to him and settles his sash, and rings the bell). Also, it is significant that Alice has not given up her career upon marriage; in fact, like a twentieth-century feminist, she has elected to combine them. Not only that, Alice has achieved these successes simply by virtue of her own willpower and ability to assess and control her situation. In this respect, she is a remarkable instance of Hillis Miller's observation that "As Victorian fiction develops there is an increasing focus on intersubjective relations to the exclusion of man's relation to physical nature or to any supernatural power, and there is an increasing tendency to define man in terms of the strength and quality of his volition."[103]

While it possesses the formal characteristics of a Victorian novel, then, *A Drama in Muslin*, like many late-Victorian novels, embodies a sharp criticism of a segment of Victorian society. Paul Sporn points out that "Although it cannot compare in rhetoric and compactness with *Esther Waters* or in vigor with *A Mummer's Wife*, [*A Drama in Muslin*] stands alone among Moore's fiction in its subversiveness."[104]

This is true; the events of *A Drama in Muslin*, enhancing one of the main functions of its Victorian omniscient narrator, point to several moral conclusions, all of which are more or less "subversive" to the established social order of the Irish upper class. Women (and also tenant farmers) are not commodities or mere objects, and any social order which treats them as such is evil. The personal conscience (in this case Alice's) can triumph over the public conscience and have both independence (through work) and companionship (through a marriage based on affection rather than status). And, the confusion of the sexual passions with the religious (as in Cecilia's case) is morbid and unhealthy. The assertive vigour with which these precepts are presented make *A Drama in Muslin*, by some considerable margin, George Moore's most didactic novel.

4. Structural Elements

The Style of *A Drama in Muslin*, as I have pointed out, consists largely of a distillation of the symbolist techniques Moore admired in Huysmans' *À Rebours*. It seems strange that such an exotic influence could result in anything that resembled a conventional novel, but in fact Huysmans' decorative lushness turned out to be admirably suited to the Victorian mode. The slightly baroque descriptions and long, convoluted sentences are very much at home on the lips of the conventional omniscient narrator. The following, for example, is a combination of extravagant Huysmanesque detail and a Victorian creation of atmosphere:

> And the skirts, what an importance they took in the great sitting-room full of easy-chairs and Swiss scenery: chalets, lakes, cascades, and chamois, painted on the light-coloured walls. The big ottoman was swollen with bustled skirts; the little low seats around the fire disappeared under skirts; skirts were tucked away to hide the slippered feet, skirts were laid out along the sofas to show the elegance of the cut. Then woolwork and circulating novels were produced, and the conversation turned on marriage. (152)

Within this rich descriptive style the narrator, freed from naturalistic "objectivity," is able to express the whole range of emotions common to Victorian narrators, from indignation to pity. This is why the mysticism of the "moon" metaphor, for instance, which occurs in similar scenes in *A Drama in Muslin* and the naturalistic *A Mummer's Wife,* is appropriate in the former but not in the latter. After Mrs. Lawler thwarts Olive's attempt to elope and she is lying in the woods with a twisted ankle,

> Many and passionate were the efforts Olive made to rise, but the pain was too piercing, and unable to reach the paling, she lay on the wet ground moaning, and listening between her moans for hours to the mysterious noises and still more mysterious silences of the night. The moon rose higher and higher, and, wan and pale as the girl's face, floated over the tall firs; and the fantastic shadow of the dead tree turned and turned until it became lost in other shadows; and the bird of prey came back with a loud clapping of wings, and it roosted till dawn on the topmost branch. (280)

This is hardly excessive in comparison to the rich, exotic descriptions in the rest of *A Drama in Muslin*; whereas the death of Kate's baby in *A Mummer's Wife*, which is described in a similar fashion, is recognized by most critics as a discordant note in the matter-of-fact tone of the novel:

> Already the rim of the light had become a crescent, and before her eyes closed in sleep the full moon looked down through the window into the cradle, waking the sleeping child. But her cries were too weak; her mother lay in sleep beyond reach of her wails, heartbreaking though they were. The little blankets were cast aside, and the struggle between life and death began: soft roundnesses fell into distortions; chubby knees were wrenched to and fro, muscles

> seemed to be torn, and a few minutes later little Kate, who had known of this world but a ray of moonlight, died—a glimpse of the moon was all that had been granted to her. After watching for an hour or more, the moon moved up the skies; and in Kate's dream the moon was the great yellow witch in the pantomime, who, before striding her broomstick, cries back: "Thou art mine only, for ever and for ever!" (308)

As Noël justifiably complains, "Quelle aberration a pu inciter Moore à mêler aux détails véridiques . . . une série d'interventions surnaturelles? L'impression d'objectivité, maintenue jusque là malgré les commentaires de l'auteur s'effondre et il faut quelque temps avant que le romancier ne reprenne en main son lecteur, avant que le patient réalisme des notations ou des incidents ne recrée l'illusion."[105] In the later novel, of course, there is no "illusion" of rigid objectivity to be destroyed; the "moon" passage is only one of many instances of fanciful description on the part of the narrator.

The faults of *A Drama in Muslin*, not surprisingly, are the faults of many Victorian novels. Some of its lengthy descriptions and asides, as I have pointed out, are slow and somewhat tedious. There is an occasional awkwardness in the writing, as in the confusion of tenses in the description of Alice's play ("When the Queen entered she was greeted with roars of laughter. Aghast, she stands on the threshhold . . . " [11]), and the omniscient narrator, especially in regard to the political sub-plot, sometimes adopts a rather pompous attitude or dictatorial tone. The following, for example, sounds more like the propagandist of *Parnell and His Island* than the storyteller of a novel:

> Dublin is a city without a conviction, without an opinion. Things are right and wrong according to the dictum of the nearest official. If it be not absolutely ill-bred to say you think this, or are inclined to take such or such a view, it is certainly more advisable to say that the Attorney-General thinks so, or that on one occasion you heard the State Steward, the Chamberlain, or any other equally distinguished underling express this or that opinion. Castle tape is worn in time of mourning and in the time of feasting. Every gigman in the Kildare Street wears it in his buttonhole, and the ladies of Merrion Square are found to be gartered with it. (191)

There is also a sense that Moore has tried to cram too much into this novel; Milton Chaikin describes it as "too long," like many Victorian novels. *A Drama in Muslin* is in fact a late instance of James's Victorian "baggy monster," with a corresponding richness of detail and looseness of form. As such, apart from the flaws I have noted, it is remarkably well handled. The omniscient narrator is convincingly concerned and moralistic. Alice (while she lacks warmth to a certain extent) is an admirable and intelligent heroine, and Huysmans' style is beautifully adapted to the vivid social scenes of the novel.

In addition, we can recognize elements of Moore's own distinctive technique. The structure of the whole, for instance, is unified and seamless, considering the disparate themes. The pace is likewise skillfully maintained, apart from the sudden jump ("Two years and a half have passed away" [324]) after Alice marries Dr. Reed. In this connection, in fact, Moore's own criticism of his novel seems unduly harsh: "When judged by the time standard," he says, "the 'Drama in Muslin' is found wanting. . . . I have compressed seven or eight years into three. . . ."[106] This is true, but the compression is unobtrusive and convincing. Summaries of large units of time, such as the Bartons' second Dublin season, for instance, are varied with snatches of vivid particulars:

> The girls passed their second season in the same manner as their first. *Les deux pièces de résistance* at Mount Street were a dissipated young English lord and a gouty old Irish distiller; and Mrs. Barton was making every effort to secure one of these. . . . But not much way was made with either, and when one returned to London and the other to a sick-bed, Olive abandoned herself to a series of flirtations. At the Castle she danced with all who asked her, and she sat out dances in the darkest corners of the most distant rooms with every officer stationed in Dublin. Mrs. Barton never refused an invitation to any dance, no matter how low, and in all the obscure "afternoons" in Mount Street and Pembroke Street Olive's blonde cameo-like face was seen laughing with every paltry official of Cork Hill and the gewgaw gig-men of Kildare Street.
>
> In May the Bartons went abroad. (269)

There is also some evidence of the smooth transitions from narration to dialogue that were a distinctive feature of *A Mummer's Wife*. For instance, the narrator's diatribe on the political corruption of Dublin merges easily back into the main narrative in the following way:

> See the pot-hatted Gigmen of the Kildare Street Club! The green flags of the League are passing; the cries of a new Ireland awaken the dormant air; but the Gigmen foam at their windows and spit out mongrel curses on the land that refuses to call them Irishmen.
>
> "The country is going to the devil!" cries one.
>
> "Oh! that brute Gladstone!" moans a second.
>
> "Are you going to Lady Georgina's tea, this afternoon?" asks a third.
>
> "Of course; the whole club is to be there, I believe."
>
> Notwithstanding her limited income, Lady Georgina was a person of taste. . . .
>
> "This is considered to be the most artistic house in Dublin," said Mrs. Barton, as the servant showed them upstairs.
>
> "How lovely the camellias look," said Olive. (159)

The joining of the political sub-plot to the main plot is also skilfully managed, and in fact conforms very closely to Moore's original conception of it: "I now began to regard my projected work with unmixed feelings of satisfaction, so entirely new did it seem to me in structure.—The drama of muslin enacted by the daughters of an enslaving caste upon a dark tapestry whereon should be woven the story of a people's struggle for nationhood. . . ."[107] As I indicated earlier, this "dark tapestry" provides a striking and ironic contrast to the voluptuous and delicate colours of the main plot. Throughout the novel the two plots are joined by a series of small touches, such as May's complaint to Mrs. Gould that

> I know I can't marry him, and I am not in love with him; but I must amuse myself with something. I can't sit here all day listening to you lamenting over the Land League; and, after a certain number of hours, conjecturing whether Mickey Moran will or will not pay his rent becomes monotonous. (83)

Such glimpses of the dark political background, while they are seen from time to time, never threaten to obscure the "drama in muslin"; the sub-plot remains unequivocally subordinate to the main plot. The book should not, as Jeffares suggests, "be seen as a companion piece" to *Parnell and his Island*.[108] It is primarily a social novel, not a political one.

And it is a social novel which is well worth critical scrutiny. Jeffares is right when he speaks of *A Drama in Muslin* as "unreasonably neglected." *Muslin*, the 1917 revision, plays down many of the novel's

Victorian elements (Alice's role as heroine, Cecilia's sexual-religious confusion, the political sub-plot and the social life of Dublin)[109] and is undoubtedly more "Moore-like" but, as Jeffares points out, it is not as revealing as the "warts and all" original.[110] This original, as I have shown, is unique. Apart from being the only novel in the Victorian mode that Moore ever wrote, it constitutes the first adaptation of French symbolist stylistic techniques to the English fictional tradition.

FOOTNOTES

[1] George Moore, "*Defensio Pro Scriptis Meis*," *Time*, 5 (March 1887), 277-78.

[2] *Ibid.*, 278.

[3] "*A Drama in Muslin*," *Saturday Review*, LXII (July 24, 1886), 131.

[4] "*A Drama in Muslin*," *Academy*, XXX (July 17, 1886), 40.

[5] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 265.

[6] Jeffares, *George Moore*, p. 17.

[7] Moore,"*Defensio*," 277.

[8] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 119.

[9] William C. Frierson, "George Moore Compromised With the Victorians," *The Man of Wax*, p. 81.

[10] George Moore, "Preface," *Muslin* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. vii.

[11] Milton Chaikin, "Balzac, Zola and George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin*," *Revue de littérature comparée*, XXIX (Oct.-Dec. 1955), 541.

[12] Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 296.

[13] Chaikin, "Balzac, Zola and George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin*," 542.

[14] See Nejdefors-Frisk, *George Moore's Naturalistic Prose*, p. 107; Walter Ferguson, *The Influence of Flaubert on George Moore* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934), p. 47; Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, pp. 117-18.

[15] Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1894), p. 164.

"'First prize for general farming!' announced the president.
'—Just now, for example, when I went to your home . . . .'

'To Mr. Bizat of Quincampoix.'

'—Did I know I would accompany you?'

'Seventy francs!'

'—A hundred times I tried to leave; yet I followed you and stayed . . . '

'For manures!'

'—As I would stay to-night, to-morrow, all other days, all my life!'

'To Monsieur Caron of Argueil, a gold medal!'

'—For I have never enjoyed anyone's company so much.'

'To Monsieur Bain of Givry-Saint-Martin.'

'—And I will never forget you.'

'For a merino ram . . .'

'—Whereas you will forget me; I'll pass through your life as a mere shadow . . .'

'To Monsieur Belot of Notre-Dame.'

'—But no, tell me there can be a place for me in your thoughts, in your life, can't there?'

'Hog! first prize equally divided between Messrs. Leherisse and Cullembourg, sixty francs!'" (*Madame Bovary*, trans. Paul de Man, p. 107.

[16] Moore, "*Defensio*," 279.

[17] Ferguson, *The Influence of Flaubert*, pp. 47-48.

[18] J.-K. Huysmans, *À Rebours* (Paris: Fasquelle, n.d.), pp. 77-78.

"Indeed, each and every liqueur, in his opinion, corresponded in taste with the sound of a particular instrument. Dry curacao, for instance, was like the clarinet with its piercing, velvety note; kummel like the oboe with its sonourous, nasal timbre; creme de menthe and anisette like the flute, at once sweet and tart, soft and shrill. Then to complete the orchestra there was kirsch, blowing a wild trumpet blast; gin and whisky raising the roof of the mouth with the blare of their cornets and trombones; marc-brancy matching the tubas with its deafening din; while peals of thunder came from the cymbal and the bass drum, which arak and mastic were banging and beating with all their might.

He considered that this analogy could be pushed still further and that string quartets might play under the palatal arch, with the violin represented by an old brandy, choice and heady, biting and delicate; with the viola simulated by rum, which was stronger, heavier, and quieter; with vespetro as poignant, drawn-out, sad, and tender as a violoncello; and with the double-bass a fine old bitter, full-bodied, solid, and dark. One might even form a quintet, if this were thought desirable, by adding a fifth instrument, the harp, imitated to near perfection by the vibrant savour, the clear, sharp, silvery note of dry cumin" (*Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959], pp. 58-59).

[19] Hone reports that the Miss Robinsons played a joke on Moore by adding and reading aloud to him the following sentence: "Everything was represented there, from the light clarinette of the embroidered lace handkerchief to the profound trombone of the red flannel pantaloons." To their delight, Moore "fell into the trap and defended the phrase which he had never used" (*The Life of George Moore*, p. 120).

[20] J.-K. Huysmans, "Émile Zola et *L'Assommoir*" (1876), reprinted in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 235.

[21] See, for example, Melvin J. Friedman, "The Symbolist Novel: Huysmans to Malraux," *Modernism*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 454.

[22] Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures*, p. 300.

[23] "The Five" were Paul Bonnetaine, J.-H. Rosny, Lucien Descaves, Paul Margueritte and Gustave Guiches. These authors, who signed the "Manifeste des Cinq contre *La Terre*" (*Figaro*, Aug. 18, 1887), claimed to be Zola's disciples, but according to George Becker, they were unknown to Zola and may have acted as a result of "a cabal led by Daudet or Goncourt out of jealousy toward Zola" (*Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, p. 344).

[24] J.-K. Huysmans, "Preface," *Against the Grain* (New York: Illustrated Editions, 1931), p. 53.

[25] *Ibid*. p. 56

[26] J.-K. Huysmans, *Là-Bas* (Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1891), p. 6. "'We must,' he thought, 'retain the documentary veracity, the precision of detail, the compact and sinewy language of realism, but we must also dig down into the soul and cease trying to explain mystery in terms of our sick senses. If possible the novel ought to be compounded of two elements, that of the soul and that of the body, and these ought to be inextricably bound together as in life. Their inter-reactions, their conflicts, their reconciliation, ought to furnish the dramatic interest. In a word, we must follow the road laid out once and for all by Zola, but at the same time we must trace a parallel route in the air by which we may go above and beyond. . . . A spiritual naturalism!'" (*Down There*, trans. Keene Wallis [New York: University Books, 1958], pp. 4-5).

[27] Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature," 866.

[28] Richard Le Gallienne, Review of Churton Collins' *Illustrations of Tennyson* in *Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890's*, ed. Karl Beckson (New York: Randon House, 1966), pp. 134-35.

[29] Moore, "A Curious Book," 6.

[30] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 169.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 254 n. 3.

[32] Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, trans. Walter Clement (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1937), p. 139.

[33] Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties*, p. 63.

[34] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 130.

[35] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 110.

[36] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 119.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[38] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 69.

[39] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 131.

[40] Farmer, *Le Mouvement esthétique*, p. 90.

[41] Moore, "Preface," *Muslin*, pp. ix-x.

[42] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 86.

[43] Farmer, *Le Mouvement esthétique*, pp. 91-92.

[44] S. M. Steward, "J.-K. Huysmans and George Moore," *The Romanic Review*, XXV, 3 (July-Sept. 1934), 197.

[45] *Ibid.*, 197-98.

[46] *Ibid.*, 199.

[47] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 109.

[48] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 100.

[49] Huysmans, *À Rebours*, p. 27. "The degeneration of this ancient house had clearly followed a regular course" (*Against Nature*, p. 17).

[50] George Moore, *Avowals*, pp. 38-39.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[53] Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction*, p. 63.

[54] Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Norman Page (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 34.

[55] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," *Longman's Magazine* (Sept. 1884), 504.

[56] George Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, p. 20.

[57] Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, p. 319.

[58] Farmer, *Le Mouvement esthétique*, p. 90.

[59] Helmut Gerber, ed. *George Moore in Transition* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), p. 94.

[60] See, for example, Michael Wheeler, *The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979).

[61] Frank Chapman, "Hardy the Novelist," *Scrutiny*, III (1934-35), 26, 28.

[62] Robert Porter Sechler, *George Moore: "A Disciple of Walter Pater"* (Folcroft: The Folcroft Press, 1931), p. 23.

[63] See Chapter I, pp. 26-27.

[64] Chaikin, "Balzac, Zola and George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin*," 543.

[65] George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* (London: Remington, 1880), I, 1-3.

[66] Moore, *Hail and Farewell*, pp. 388-89.

[67] See Chapter II, n. 59.

[68] Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction*, p. 3.

[69] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 266.

[70] Moore, *"Defensio,"* 280.

[71] *Ibid.*, 280-81.

[72] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 105.

[73] Moore, "*Defensio,*" 282.

[74] Émile Zola, *Pot-Bouille, Les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1964), p. 43. "Losing all restraint, Hortense and Berthe flung themselves upon their uncle anew. Checked at first by their good breeding, this desire for the twenty francs suddenly got the better of them, and in their wild excitement they flung manners to the winds. The one, with both her hands, searched his waistcoat pockets, while the other thrust her fist into the pockets of his frock-coat. Assailed in this way, uncle Bachelard still struggled with his persecutors, but laughter overcame him, a laughter broken by drunken hiccups. . . . Berthe, grown resolute, thrust her hand into one of his breeches pockets. The girls trembled with excitement as they grew rougher and rougher, and they could almost have boxed their uncle's ears. Then Berthe uttered a cry of victory; from the depths of his pocket she drew forth a handful of money, which she scattered on a plate, and there, among copper and silver, was a gold twenty-franc piece" (*Piping Hot*, trans. Percy Pinkerton [New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924], p. 47).

[75] See Frierson, "George Moore Compromised With the Victorians," *The Man of Wax*, pp. 75-86.

[76] Jenni Calder, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 199.

[77] Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn*, III, 327-28.

[78] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 187.

[79] "The Tree of Knowledge," *New Review*, X (Jan-July 1894), 675-90.

[80] Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, pp. 20-21.

[81] Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel*, p. 94.

[82] Moore, "*Defensio,*" 280.

[83] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 130.

[84] Moore, "*Defensio,*" 280.

[85] *Ibid.*, 279.

[86] *Ibid.*, 281.

[87] See Janet Todd, *Women's Friendships in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 4.

[88] For others, see Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), p. 51: "Few New Woman heroines escaped neurosis of some kind. . . . [See, for example,] the works of George Egerton, Emma Frances Brooke, Mona Caird and Menie Muriel Dowie. . . ."

[89] Moore, "*Defensio*," 281.

[90] Moore, *Hail and Farewell*, p. 275.

[91] "'It seems strange,' I said, abandoning myself to recollection, 'that the critics of the 'eighties failed to notice that the theme of *A Drama in Muslin* is the same as that of the *Doll's House*; the very title should have pointed this out to them.'" Moore, "Preface," *Muslin*, p. x.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

[93] Moore, "*Defensio*," 280.

[94] *Ibid.*, 280.

[95] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 179.

[96] Susan Siefert, *The Dilemma of the Talented Heroine* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1978), p. 6.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[98] A. R. Cunningham, "The 'New Woman Fiction' of the 1890's," *Victorian Studies*, XVII (1973), 179-80.

[99] Moore, "Preface," *Muslin*, p. xii.

[100] Paul Sporn, "Marriage and Class Conflict: The Subversive Link in George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin*," *CLIO: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History*, III, 1 (1973), 16.

[101] *Ibid.*, 15.

[102] Moore, "*Defensio*," 280.

[103] Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction*, p. 33.

[104] Sporn, "Marriage and Class Conflict," 17.

[105] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 112.

[106] Moore, "*Defensio,*" 283.

[107] *Ibid.*, 279.

[108] A. Norman Jeffares, "Introduction," *A Drama in Muslin* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1981), p. ix.

[109] For a detailed but concise account of these changes, see Peter Ure's "*Muslin* and *A Drama in Muslin*: A Note on the Revision," the Appendix to "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, pp. 106-08.

[110] Jeffares, "*A Drama in Muslin,*" *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 19.

INTERCHAPTER

THE AESTHETIC NOVELS

> I was born, I live, I shall die a peculiar man. I could not be commonplace were I to try. The bitterest thing is what I think of myself:—it [Spring Days] is not the work of a genius, not that of great talent. It is the work of a man affected by that most terrible of all maladies, a dash of genius.[1]
>
> George Moore in a letter to his mother

Nowhere is Moore's "malady"—his "dash" of genius—so evident as in the five "aesthetic" novels of his early period, *A Modern Lover* (1883), *A Mere Accident* (1887), *Spring Days* (1888), *Mike Fletcher* (1889) and *Vain Fortune* (1891). In these novels, as Chaikin points out, "Amico Moorini was forever popping up, seizing the pen and writing nonsense. . . ."[2] As I noted in Chapter I, naturalism and aestheticism were two distinct strands running side by side through Moore's work before 1895. These two strands finally merged in *The Lake* (1905, the book in which Moore said he had "learned to write"), in which the world-of-things realism of his early period was modified by the more spiritual concerns of symbolism. Realism, however, was by far the more important of the two strands; the "gladness of the physical world" was in the end what he admired most even in the work of aesthetic writers such as Gautier and Pater. The success of his later work, notably his Irish short stories and his "melodic line," is a result of Moore's development and refinement of his early realism.

In this respect, Moore betrays his "Englishness": Holbrook Jackson calls the English aesthetes "spiritual foreigners in our midst" and points out that "the decadence proper, in this country, . . . was the mood of a minority."[3] Decadence was not only uncongenial to the Anglo-Saxon temperament, it was also uncongenial, finally, to Moore, even though he admired it. S. M. Steward suggests that this is because Moore did not understand aestheticism: "Moore's affinity with Huysmans does not go farther than a certain sensuous sympathy. Because he could never follow Huysmans into that unrelieved brutality which was the genesis of inevitable reaction, Moore could never make that strange transformation of spirit which Huysmans made. . . . From Huysmans he gained an interest in aestheticism, learned the technique of spiritualist naturalism, and tried to sprinkle his pages with gold. Even Huysmans, however, was not thurmaturge enough to design for him a gown which could conceal the English squire beneath it."[4] Richard Cave, on the other hand, suggests that Moore failed to engage seriously with the aesthetic movement because he had already outgrown it: "Moore was a generation older than most of the English writers associated with that movement; he was now well into his middle-age and the London of the Nineties was a pale Anglicized imitation of the Paris of his youth. . . ."[5] The truth is probably somewhere between these two extremes. Moore had not outgrown aestheticism, nor was he incapable of understanding it; but he was unable to find an effective fictional mode in which to express it. His short story "Albert Nobbs," for example, one of the most strangely moving of the stories in *Celibate Lives* (1927), is based on a situation much like that in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, and yet it is almost antithetical to Gautier's novel in its extremely non-decadent effect. Poor Albert Nobbs changes his/her sexual identity out of an innocent desire to survive rather than d'Albert's exotic urge to explore, and the relation between the two is much like that between a Yorkshire pudding and a soufflé. Moore's early aesthetic novels are signally less successful, lacking both the strength of his realistic novels and the simplicity of his later ones. In fact, the *Confessions* ("the arbitrariness of whose contents is a virtue," as Chaikin points out) is Moore's only successful aesthetic work, and it is in a different mode altogether.

Moore's five aesthetic novels of the 1880's are of some historical interest, as they constitute a link between the "first wave" of French-influenced English decadence of the 1870's (represented by the Pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne and Pater) and the "second wave" of decadence in the nineties (represented by the fin-de-siècle poets, Beardsley and Wilde). Because they were such resounding failures artistically, however, it is unlikely that these novels actually influenced the latter decadent writers; the impact of *Confessions* was far greater in this respect.

This chapter will consist mainly of a review of the existing criticism, as this deals satisfactorily with the aesthetic novels. Their inferior artistic quality, a partial cause of Moore's flagging literary reputation, has been well documented, and perhaps the less said about it the better. For my purposes, however, it is interesting to note that these novels all have male main characters, unlike the three realistic novels with which my study is primarily concerned. These characters, as Moore's critics have pointed out, are effete sensualists (or ascetics, in the case of John Norton) whose vapidity makes them only pale copies of their French originals, as well as singularly uninteresting heroes. Noël points out that "Les héros du cycle don-juanesque sont en général des ratés, des esprits stériles."[6] The slackness of these heroes is reflected in the slackness of the writing in most of these novels, and in the context of my thesis they serve mainly to illustrate by contrast the enormous strengths of the realistic novels of the same period.

A Modern Lover, although it precedes the other four novels in this group by four years, bears a much closer resemblance to them than to either *A Mummer's Wife* or *A Drama in Muslin*. Lionel Stevenson says that "it marked the arrival of French realism in England."[7] By this he presumably means much the same thing as Arnold Bennett meant by "realism":

> No discerning student could read *A Modern Lover* in 1883 without being impressed by the profound difference between it and all previous English novels. It was candidly erotic; it depressed; it presented a group of principal characters so unsavoury that one cannot possibly respect any of them; it scorned to be either bright or breezy or wholesome or anything that might secure the approbation of a great and enlightened public. But the quality which isolates it is deeper than these. It is written throughout with that religious, punctilious regard for major and minor truth which entitles it to be called "realistic." It was the first realistic novel in England.[8]

While these claims are all true to some extent, they do not make *A Modern Lover* a "realistic" novel in the sense that *A Mummer's Wife* is, for example. The main thing that detracts from its realism is its lack of seriousness, which causes its "religious, punctilious regard for major and minor truth" to seem merely frivolous. It portrays not everyday "reality," but the rarefied air in which its hero, Lewis Seymour, exists. He is worldly and self-indulgent, like the hero of *Confessions*, and climbs to success through the self-sacrificing assistance of three devoted mistresses. He is, in fact, what Moore and his acquaintances in Paris in the seventies had been—a bohemian (or, as Stevenson puts it, "an arrant cad").[9] He dabbles with art and with the affections of women, and muses "on the melancholy poetry of suicide."[10] He believes that "'Flirtation, after all, is nothing; it only means making oneself agreeable'. . . . The whole man was in the phrase. . . . It gave the mental and physical character of the modern lover" (III, 152, and here one can not help noticing the immense contrast between this light-hearted view and that of the narrator in *A Drama in Muslin* who disapproved so vehemently of Mrs. Barton's notions of "harmless" flirtation). Like the George Moore of *Confessions*, "It was part of Lewis' nature to believe that women were in love with him. . . ." (I, 94).

Several critics have noted the similarity in the plots of *A Modern Lover* and Maupassant's *Bel Ami*, which was published two years later. As Frierson says, "We must assume that Maupassant was the borrower."[11] There are also similarities between Moore's novel and Zola's *L'Oeuvre*: the opening scene in which Gwynnie poses in the nude for Lewis and the "Academy" scene in which crowds gather to ridicule several "modern" artists both have remarkably similar counterparts in Zola's novel, as do Lewis's wish to "conquer" Paris ("The city seemed to him like some voluptuous siren" [II, 10]) and his agony at not being able to execute his painting ("It was with difficulty he restrained himself from kicking the canvas through. . . . He was like a starving man led and tempted by a piece of meat that an invisible hand would not let him grasp. Often he threw down his palette, and holding his head between his hands, tried to solve the problem" [II, 83]). *L'Oeuvre* is a serious novel, however, while *A Modern Lover* is not. Claude and his artist friends are ready to starve and die for their art, whereas Lewis will compromise his artistic beliefs for money, a great deal of which he spends "in scent, powder, nail polishers, etc. . . . . His white, feminine hands . . . seemed to love the touch of all things connected with the toilette table" (I, 98-99), calling to mind the effete, luxury-loving hero of *Confessions*.

Little remains to be said about Moore's first novel. It embodies Moore's idea at the time of the "decadence" of Gautier and Baudelaire, which seems to have been synonymous for him with the risqué, light-hearted worldliness of Lewis Hawkins and the other art students he knew in Paris.

In 1887, the year after *A Drama in Muslin* was published, Moore embarked on what Frierson refers to as his "second period," in which he was primarily concerned with "the dramatic portrayal of soul-sickness."[12] The books written during this time were the novels so disastrously influenced by Huysmans and Pater; the mature Moore was thoroughly embarrassed by them, as well he might have been. They are of interest because they show Moore changing direction (justifying somewhat Wilde's remark that he "conducted his education in public"), but they are resounding failures as novels.

The first of these, *A Mere Accident*, is described by Hone as "an event of some importance in Moore's career, not only because he returned to the same subject on two later occasions, but also because the choice of such a hero showed that he now wished to carry out something other than that typical representation of society which was the object of the naturalistic school. The book would certainly have never been written if Moore had not read Huysmans."[13] John Norton, the hero of *A Mere Accident*, is, as Lionel Stevenson points out, "a fictional portrait of . . . Edward Martyn [Moore's ascetic cousin], though with an admixture of Marius and Des Esseintes."[14] Certainly the resemblance to Des Esseintes—or to his "ascetic" side, at least—is uppermost:[15] John Norton withdraws from the world, surrounds himself with art and music, and is utterly fastidious about his surroundings. ("I must alter the architecture of this house," he says, "or I must return to Stanton College" [170]). Steward points out that John Norton furnishes his room in a monastic manner identical to Des Esseintes', complete with a prie-dieu.[16] John Norton suffers none of Des Esseintes' real spiritual agonies, however; by comparison he appears simply fussy, weak and prudish. Steward justly calls him a "pale carbon copy of Des Esseintes, a beef-tea aesthete. . . . [He] is the veriest amateur and the portrayal of his character never penetrates the sheerly external manifestations of the spirit. . . . Moore's endeavours to make of John Norton a Des Esseintes, to produce the exotic perfumes of Huysmans' erudition, end in a mild English rose-water concoction. . . ."[17] This criticism is harsh but justified; the "dose of fantasy, mysticism, idealism which was inherent in John's character" (110) seems entirely superficial. Even Hone, a more tolerant critic, calls *A Mere Accident* "a dead failure."[18]

There is an aspect of John Norton that is interesting, however, and that is his aversion to women. While Des Esseintes renounces sex because of satiety and in order to seek more refined and subtle sensations, John Norton has no sexual desire to renounce. He would like the maid-servants to be removed from the chapel because of their "unspeakable feminality" (61) and, like Cecilia in *A Drama in Muslin*, he is revolted by "the horrid fabric of marriage and domesticity" (165). He regards the bedroom he will share with his future wife as "a symbol—with the great bed, voluptuous, the corpulent arm-chair, the toilet-table shapeless with muslin—of the hideous laws of the world and the flesh, ever at variance and at war, and ever defeating the indomitable aspirations of the soul" (165). In this respect, at least, John Norton is unique; as Lloyd Fernando points out, "It is a major irony that no English novelist, except Moore . . . cared to represent corresponding deviations [to those of Cecilia Cullen] in men although probably there was at least equal justification for such a theme."[19]

Moore's next novel, *Spring Days* (1888), was originally planned as the first novel of a trilogy. Hone tells us that "The subject of the first part of the proposed trilogy was to be young men in London pursuing the world's amusements; that of the second, servants from the servants' point of view; that of the third, the hopes and disappointments of old people who see their children growing up. . . ."[20] Obviously, this idea was soon abandoned; the second proposed novel became *Esther Waters* and the third never materialized. The subject of "young men in

London," however, was to occupy Moore both in *Spring Days* and in his next novel, *Mike Fletcher*. The original sub-title of *Spring Days* was "A Prelude to 'Don Juan,'" and in a letter to Clara Lanza Moore said that he was thinking of calling the book "*The Seekers of Oblivion*. . . . If I ever write a great novel, it will be Don Juan."[21] He also regarded this novel as "a sort of comic King Lear"[22] and an attempt to "recreate Jane Austen's method."[23]

The result of these fairly disparate aims, surprisingly enough, is a genuinely amusing novel of light comedy. Mr. Brookes, with his recurring "I suppose it will all be the same a hundred years hence" and "I made it [his money] all myself," is like a stylized, funnier version of Dorothea Brooke's uncle in *Middlemarch*, and Willie, with his trademark of the ubiquitous carefully-wrapped brown paper parcel, is also humourous. Perhaps best of all, though, is the characters' rambling dialogue. In his discussion of Jane Austen in *Avowals*, Moore declares that "the power of writing chatter is the sign manual of the great writer,"[24] and, while his power of creating "chatter" is not quite up to Austen's standard, it is still very good. In the following excerpt, for instance, Mr. Brookes and the two aunts despair over Sally's frivolous attitude toward men:

> "Sally tries to set her against him; she laughs at him, says he is pompous, and imitates him. . . . She says he is old, and says that kissing him would be like rubbing your face in a mattress."
>
> "The fact is," said Aunt Mary, "Sally ought to have been a man; had she been a man, it would have been all right."
>
> . . . .
>
> "I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence."

> "No, James, it will not," replied Aunt Hester, with unusual determination."[25]

This exhibits a lightness of touch that exists throughout the novel. Even the characters' longer speeches are amusing enough to sustain the humour without tedium, as in the following confused reasoning by the distracted Mr. Brookes:

> "But we had to call on the Horlocks. Every Viceroy that ever came to India called upon her, and they're excellent people—titled people come down from London to see them: but I daresay their banking accounts wouldn't bear looking into. She walks about the green with the chemist's wife, and has the people of the baths to dinner. Most extraordinary woman. I like her, I enjoy her society; but I can't follow her in her opinions. She says that only men are bad; that all animals are good; that it is only men who make them bad. Her views on hydrophobia are most astonishing. She says it is a mild and easy death, and sees no reason why the authorities should attempt to stamp it out. She quite frightened me with the story she told me of a mad dog that died in her arms. But that by the way. The point is not now whether she is right to feed mice in her bedroom instead of getting rid of them, but whether we should call on people we don't want to know because she asks us to do so. (15)

Unless it is read as a comic novel, of course, *Spring Days* is merely vacuous. Richard Cave refers to it as "a trivial, repetitive piece and certainly [Moore's] worst work of fiction,"[26] and Anthony Farrow (who attempts a serious discussion of *Spring Days* as "a study of weakness") reports that "the harried reader can only echo the words of Frank Escott at the end of the novel, 'Alas, those were Spring Days.'"[27] Certainly the reader looking for a serious discussion of the Don Juan theme will be disappointed, as this gets lost, so to speak, in the comedy, taking on the humourous tone of the rest of the novel. Frank Escott, for example, the young, amorous artist in the novel, is as disorganized and distracted by trivia as the rest of the characters:

> After breakfast he [Frank] lay on the sofa, and read society papers and smoked cigarettes. He could not drag himself to the studio. "A man should live at his studio, impossible to settle down to work, if he doesn't," he thought, and he watched Mrs. Horlock coming up the green accompanied by the chemist's wife and the pugs. . . .
>
> Frank took up a volume of Browning, turned over the leaves, and laid the book down to watch a drove of horses that had suddenly been turned out on the green to feed, and he laughed to see the children throwing stones, making them gallop frantically. . . .
>
> When he entered his studio his colour scheme pleased him, and looking at the rafters he thought that the stained wood was handsome and appropriate. The grey carpet was soft under foot, and the lustre and form of a grand piano suggested Chopin and Schubert. His studio seemed to him a symbol of his own refinement, and being moved, perhaps, by the silence and the quiet of the north light, he took his violin, and turning from time to time to look on himself on [sic] the glass or his picture on the easel, he played Stradella's "Chanson d'Eglise." (173, 178)

This is admittedly not as deliciously ironic as Jane Austen's humour, and perhaps Richard Cave is justified in his judgment that *Spring Days* is "just not funny or witty enough,"[28] especially in light of the fact that several critics have missed its humour. At the very least, however, Moore's later perception of a "zest"[29] in the novel is warranted. Forrest Reid sees affinities between the middle-class milieu of *Spring Days* and that of *A Drama in Muslin*, and applies terms such as "buoyancy," "freshness," "animation," "brightness," "vivacity," "humour," "boldness" and "vigorous vitality" to the former,[30] quite accurately, I think.

Mike Fletcher, however, is another matter. Its hero represents the worldly as opposed to the ascetic side of Des Esseintes' decadence and is a precursor of Dorian Gray and the English decadents of the 1890's. Lionel Stevenson calls *Mike Fletcher* "a violently melodramatic novel that was a total failure,"[31] and Hone informs us that "*Mike Fletcher* proved to be the only one of [Moore's] novels which he never wished to revise, and the only one of his books, not excluding the poems, of which in his old age he preferred never to speak."[32] When the bad reviews of the novel first started to appear, Moore wrote in dismay to Madame Lanza that "It is impossible that a man who writes as well as I have done, and am still writing, should be the author of three hundred pages of twaddle,"[33] but this appears to be exactly what had happened.

Mike, whose affinities with Lewis Seymour of *A Modern Lover* are made explicit (a minor character remarks, "We have in this room Don Juan in youth, middle age and old age—Mike Fletcher, Lewis Seymour, and Mr. Seabrook,"[34] and there are also several footnotes to the earlier novel) pursues dissipation as vigorously as he can, growing appropriately more bored as he does so. He is bored to start with, however, especially with the women he pursues, even though "love" is his raison d'etre. "Some men seek the source of the Nile, I the lace of a bodice," he says (16). "I think I could love her—I am sure of it; it would be impossible to weary of her—so frail—a white blonde" (18). Like Lewis (and, wishfully, like Moore), Mike finds himself irresistible to the ladies:

> "Why do they love me? I always treat them badly. Often I don't even pretend to love them, but it makes no difference. Pious women, wicked women, stupid women, clever women, high-class women, low-class women, it is all the same. That little girl I picked up in the Strand liked me before she had been talking to me five minutes. And what sudden fancies! I come into a room, and every feminine eye fills with sudden emotion. I wonder what it is. My nose is broken, and my chin sticks out like a handle. And men like me just as much as women do. It is inexplicable. True, I never say disagreeable things; and it is so natural to me to wheedle." (65)

Mike continues such desultory musings throughout the novel, until, as Milton Chaikin puts it, "In the end, full of ennui, [he] shoots himself in the middle of some purple prose."[35] Suicide does not help to invest him with seriousness or despair, however, and it is difficult to take Mike's ennui and angst seriously. Even the aesthetes of the nineties, who were similarly world-weary and love-weary, were to feel life's futility more keenly than Mike: Dowson's well-known cry "for madder music and for stronger wine" is feebly paralleled by Mike's "Oh, for a cup of tea and a slice of warm buttered toast!" (134).

Even apart from the shallowness of its main character, *Mike Fletcher* is a very poorly written novel. It is filled with interminable theoretical discussions by Mike (as the narrator rightly remarks of him, "Words come from him like flour from a mill" [63]), and it is in general terribly disjointed. Symons described *Marius* as "a sequence of scenes, woven around a sequence of moods"[36] (reminiscent of Moore's "rhythmical sequence of events described with rhythmical sequence of phrase"), and in his Introduction to *A Rebours* Havelock Ellis describes a decadent style as "one in which the unity of the book is decomposed to give place to the independence of the page. . . ."[37] Moore's novel, however, conforming to neither of these descriptions, is simply an incoherent pastiche of thoughts and incidents; toward the end, in particular, it completely disintegrates. After a minutely detailed and uninteresting description of each of the inhabitants of the Temple, for example, which takes up several pages, Mike, we are told in one short sentence, "sped away, and for nearly two years lived on the last verge of civilization, sometimes passing beyond it with the Bedouins into the interior, on slave-trading or rapacious expeditions" (254). By the end of the novel Mike is only slightly less bored than the reader, legitimately earning for this novel, I think, the epithet of "the worst novel Moore ever wrote."

His next novel, *Vain Fortune* (1891), represented both an improvement over the preceding three novels and the glimmerings of a new departure for Moore. Its hero, Hubert Price, is a more believable character than John Norton, Frank Escott or Mike Fletcher. He is a bit of a dilettante in matters of love (while he is talking to Mrs. Bentley, "the conversation . . . had wandered to the social side of the question. What did he think of divorce? She sighed, and he wondered what her story might be"),[38] but he is at least serious about his writing. Chaikin suggests that "There is a likelihood . . . that Moore's interest in the struggles of a would-be writer living up to the highest ideals of art . . . had something to do with his own creative anxieties and recent sense of failure."[39] This is probably true; we are told outright that Hubert represents "a great deal of the intellectual impotence current in our time" (164). More importantly, however, Hubert is a forerunner of the gentle, ineffectual characters of Moore's later short stories, such as Wilfrid Holmes in *Celibate Lives*. Like the latter, Hubert fails to attain worldly success through his art:

> If he had succeeded in getting that play right, what a difference it would have made! He would have been able to do a number of things he had never done, things which he had always desired to do. He had desired above all to travel—to see France and Italy; to linger, to muse in the shadows of the world's past; and after this he had desired marriage, an English wife, an English home, beautiful children, leisure, the society of friends. A successful play would have given him all these things, and now his dream must remain for ever unrealised by him. He had sunk out of sight and hearing of such life. (40)

There is an air of melancholy in such passages which pervades the whole novel. This reminds Chaikin of Turgenev;[40] a better comparison, as Richard Ellmann points out, is to Joyce's *Dubliners*, particularly "The Dead." In "The Backgrounds of 'The Dead,'" Ellmann indicates a direct borrowing by Joyce:

> The book Joyce was borrowing from was one that nobody reads any more, George Moore's *Vain Fortune*; but Joyce read it, and in his youthful essay, "The Day of the Rabblement," overpraised it as "fine, original work," when it was actually rather crude. While writing "The Dead" he evidently refreshed his memory of *Vain Fortune*, for his copy of it, now at Yale, bears the date "March 1907." It is amusing to learn that when George Moore was asked his opinion of Joyce's writing in 1916, he said, "The only book of Joyce's that I have read is a collection of stories called *Dubliners*, some of them are trivial and disagreeable, but all are written by a clever man, and the book contains one story, the longest story in the book and the last story which seemed to me perfection whilst I read it! I regretted that I was not the author of it." But I think we can say that in some sense George Moore *was* its author.[41]

This is an interesting observation, paralleling Hough's theory of Moore's influence on Joyce, and it delineates one of the ways in which Moore influenced the course of English fiction. Another striking similarity exists, I think, between the basic situation in the novel and that in D. H. Lawrence's story "The Fox": in both cases the lives of two women who live together is disrupted by the appearance of a stranger. The following snippet of dialogue, for example, could almost have occurred in the later work:

> She stood, her back turned from him, leaning on the gate, her thoughts lost in the long darkness of autumnal fields and woods.
>
> "Julia!"
>
> "You have left Emily. How did you leave her?"
>
> "She is fast asleep on the sofa. She fell asleep. Then why should I remain? The house was unbearable. She went to sleep, saying she felt very happy."
>
> "Really! What induced such a change in her? Did you—"
>
> "No; I did not ask her to marry me; but I was able to tell her that I was not going to marry you, and that seemed entirely to satisfy her." (234)

In spite of the circumstances of the love-triangle and Emily's suicide because of jealousy, *Vain Fortune* is not the "sentimental melodrama" Lionel Stevenson finds it to be.[42] But it is still obviously part of Moore's "experimental" phase, unformed and unrealized, and Moore himself virtually disowned it later in his life.

In short, Moore's early attempts to write "aesthetic" novels were artistic failures. It is not surprising that the fairly pedestrian *Spring Days* was the best of them, for, while Moore was not entirely the "English squire" Steward scornfully casts him as, he was really much more attuned in this early period to the simpler moral values embodied in naturalism and realism than the more exotic spiritual agonizing of the decadents. While John Norton, Frank Escott, Mike Fletcher and (to some extent) Hubert Price are precursors of the languid, world-weary aesthetes of the nineties, Moore himself was not a part of what Holbrook Jackson describes as the "movement of elderly youths who wrote themselves out in a slender volume or so of hot verse or ornate prose, and slipped away to die in taverns or gutters."[43] Just as Moore was not one of the "English naturalists," neither was he one of the "English decadents," even though he lent much impetus to the development of both of these schools. In both cases, the French origins of these movements caused them to remain slightly "foreign" to English literature; just as the rigorous impersonality of naturalism was uncongenial to the English temperament, so were the excesses of decadence, causing the English product to be insipid and more or less ridiculous. Ellen Moers remarks that

> What Baudelaire began in all seriousness, Oscar Wilde would finish off in all folly. When dandyism at last re-emerged in English letters, it had adsorbed Baudelaire's attitude of despair, his praise of artificiality, his recognition of evil. But Baudelaire's thought was transmitted to the *fin de siècle* through the feverish imagination of J.-K. Huysmans and the juvenile imagination of Algernon Swinburne. Dandies and corruption, dandies and sin, dandies and *les fleurs du mal* would in the 'nineties become partners in cliché. Baudelaire's ideal dandy took ridiculous shape in the posturings of Dorian Gray, who, a yellow-bound copy of *A Rebours* in hand, "looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful."[44]

But at least Moore was aware of this new mode, and at least he tried his hand at it; and perhaps it was partly because of his failures during this time that he was able to return to his earlier realistic mode with the sureness of touch that we find in *Esther Waters*.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Quoted in Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 150.

[2] Chaikin, "George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 43.

[3] Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, pp. 58, 70.

[4] Steward, "J.-K. Huysmans and George Moore," 206.

[5] Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 106.

[6] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 239.

[7] Lionel Stevenson, "George Moore: Romantic, Naturalist, Aesthete," *Études Anglaises*, XXI (Sept. 1968), 365.

[8] Bennett, *Fame and Fiction*, p. 249.

[9] Stevenson, "George Moore," 365.

[10] George Moore, *A Modern Lover* (London: Tinsley Bros., 1883), I, 16. All references in the text are to this edition.

[11] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*; p. 75. See also Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 29; Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 95; Reid, "The Novels of George Moore," 203.

[12] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 77.

[13] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, pp. 130-31.

[14] Stevenson, "George Moore," 365.

[15] John Norton bears very little resemblance to Marius, in fact, but he is greatly enamoured of Pater's novel in much the same way that Moore himself was: "It is a breath of delicious fragrance blown back to us from the antique world; nothing is lost or faded, the bloom of that glad bright world is upon every page. . . . Never did I read with such rapture of being, of growing to spiritual birth. It seemed to me

that for the first time I was made known to myself; for the first time the false veil of my grosser nature was withdrawn, and I looked into the true ethereal eyes, pale as wan water and sunset skies, of my higher self. Marius was to me an awakening; the rapture of knowledge came upon me that even our temporal life might be beautiful; that, in a word, it was possible to somehow come to terms with life. . . ." George Moore, *A Mere Accident* (London: Vizetelly, 1887), pp. 66-67. All references in the text are to this edition.

[16] Steward, "J.-K. Huysmans and George Moore," 199.

[17] *Ibid.*, 199-200.

[18] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 130.

[19] Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel*, p. 96.

[20] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 147.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[24] George Moore, *Avowals*, p. 44.

[25] George Moore, *Spring Days* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1912), pp. 86-87. All references in the text are to this edition.

[26] Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 119.

[27] Farrow, *George Moore*, p. 80.

[28] Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 119.

[29] Moore, *Spring Days*, p. ix.

[30] Reid, "The Novels of George Moore," 206.

[31] Lionel Stevenson, "Introduction," *Esther Waters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. xi.

[32] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 161.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[34] George Moore, *Mike Fletcher* (London: Ward and Downey, 1889), p. 78. All references in the text are to this edition.

[35] Chaikin, "George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 37.

[36] Symons, *Studies in Two Literatures*, p. 173.

[37] Havelock Ellis, "Introduction," *Against the Grain* by J.-K. Huysmans, trans. John Howard (New York: Lieber & Lewis, 1922), p. xiii.

[38] George Moore, *Vain Fortune* (London: Walter Scott, 1895), p. 115. All references in the text are to this edition.

[39] Chaikin, "George Moore's Early Fiction," *George Moore's Mind and Art*, p. 37.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[41] Richard Ellmann, "The Backgrounds of 'The Dead,'" *The Kenyon Review*, XX, 4 (Autumn, 1958), 522.

[42] Stevenson, "George Moore, " 365.

[43] Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, p. 70.

[44] Ellen Moers, *The Dandy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p. 283.

CHAPTER IV

ESTHER WATERS

My next novel will be more human. I shall bathe myself in the simplest and most naive emotions, the daily bread of humanity.

George Moore in a letter to Clara Lanza.[1]

1. Background

Moore's sources for his best-known novel have been a matter for critical speculation. As Hone points out, *Spring Days* was originally projected as the first novel in a trilogy, of which the next book was to be a tale of servants from the servants' point of view. This places Moore's initial inspiration for *Esther Waters* at 1888; in *A Communication to My Friends* (1933), however, he intimates that he began thinking of such a novel soon after the publication of *A Drama in Muslin*:

> My thoughts had galloped away on something that looked like an inspiration from the Muses. I was asking myself if servants, who in English literature are never introduced except as comic characters, might not be treated as the principal characters of a novel. After all, they are human beings like ourselves, though reduced by riches to a sort of partial slavery. . . . I was asking myself whether the hero of my new book should be a footman or should I take a cook for a heroine, and . . . I decided that it could be neither. A footman would not be a pleasing object in the love passages and it is hard to think of a good-tempered cook, though no doubt there are such beings. A cook is too old, but not a scullery-maid. Ah, there I have it! A scullery-maid, said I, she shall be. . . . My father bred and raced horses; a racing stable would make an admirable background in keeping with the subject of my story. I should have to draw portraits of my jockeys and trainers, but they would be only accessories; the principal figure would be the indomitable mother who will sacrifice her life for her child. And I stopped, surprised at the admirable subject that Chance had given me. Chance indicates the subject, the necessary hint we do not find in our thoughts, but come upon unexpectedly on our way, and develop as we walk.[2]

The effects of such fond recollections are somewhat mitigated, it is true, by Moore's description of "awful Emma" in *Confessions*, which is the first mention of a servant-girl in his work:

> Emma, I remember you—you are not to be forgotten—up at five o'clock every morning, scouring, washing, cooking, dressing those infamous children; seventeen hours at least out of the twenty-four at the beck and call of landlady, lodgers, and quarreling children; seventeen hours at least out of the twenty-four drudging in that horrible kitchen, running up stairs with coals and breakfasts and cans of hot water; down on your knees before a grate, pulling out the cinders with those hands—can I call them hands? The lodgers sometimes threw you a kind word, but never one that recognised that you were akin to us, only the pity that might be extended to a dog.[3]

The final Esther, of course, bears little resemblance to "awful Emma," and Lynn Bartlett suggests two other possible sources: Moore's charwoman when he was living in the Temple some years later, and an article entitled "From the Maid's Point of View" which appeared in the August 1891 issue of *The New Review*.[4] According to Bartlett, this article helped to modify Moore's concept of "awful Emma" by virtue of the fact that its author (one Maggie Younghusband) was intensely religious. In fact, it is difficult to pinpoint any definitive "source" for the character of Esther; Gilbert Frankau insists that Moore "drew the principal character of . . . *Esther Waters* from my wet nurse,"[5] and Malcolm Brown suggests that the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* may have been Moore's initial inspiration for the story of a servant.[6] Certainly that novel (which Moore very likely read) is about a maid, but there the similarity ends. The repulsive Germinie, with her sordid secret life, bears little resemblance to the honest, sensible Esther. Brown, probably realizing these discrepancies, says, "But this was not the novel Moore wrote; instead he wrote *Esther Waters*, a novel commonly assumed to be closer in kinship to *Adam Bede* . . . than to *Germinie*

Lacerteux."[7] Certainly it is true that Moore thought he could improve upon *Adam Bede*, and upon *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as well. Of Hetty Sorrel's plight he remarked that "A woman's moulding of the subject, a true moulding, would be Hetty living to save her child,"[8] and this of course is what happens in *Esther Waters*; his objections to *Tess* were numerous, and I shall examine them in some detail in this chapter.

Other source material for *Esther Waters* is suggested by Paul Sporn in "*Esther Waters*: The Sources of the Baby-Farm Episode." Apparently in 1890 Moore read and was moved by an article by Benjamin Waugh exposing the evils of baby-farming.[9] This article, which I shall discuss more fully presently, is indeed a moving plea on behalf of unwanted children, and it is not surprising that Moore was affected by it.

After his unsuccessful forays into the territory of the "aesthetic" novel, Moore seemed humbled. He wrote to Madame Lanza that "All experimentation is over now, and henceforth I shall only sow seeds in the garden that is suitable to my talent."[10] The garden was realism; its nationality, however, has been the subject of critical dispute. In the "Epistle Dedicatory" to the 1920 edition of *Esther Waters*, Moore commented proudly that it was "as characteristically English as Don Quixote is Spanish"; on the other hand he later (and just as proudly) referred to it as "pure Flaubert."[11] A similar conflict as to the "Englishness" or "Frenchness" of the novel is reflected in the critical response to it: in 1960 Graham Hough remarks that *Esther Waters* has "little of the smell of English literature,"[12] yet

Georges-Paul Collet cites it as a good instance of "la grande tradition romanesque de la littérature anglo-irlandaise: un réalisme tempéré d'humour et adouci de mélancolie."[13] Other critics, such as Granville Hicks, have recognized that "if [*Esther Waters*] is in the tradition of Fielding, Smollett, and Dickens, it is also in the tradition of Balzac and Zola."[14] This "hybrid" quality of *Esther Waters*, which has generated much critical controversy, marks Moore's genuine and lasting contribution to the English novel at this stage in its development. As Hough (having changed his mind slightly) remarks in his Introduction to Oxford's 1964 World's Classic Series edition of the novel, "It is indeed a story of a recognizable and recognized English type, yet it takes a different turn. Whether he knew it or not when writing it Moore had one foot in the Victorian novel while the other was taking a stride forward into the twentieth century."[15]

By 1894, Moore had already written one almost perfectly naturalistic novel (*A Mummer's Wife*) and one almost perfectly Victorian novel (*A Drama in Muslin*). In *Esther Waters* these two modes crossed paths and merged in possibly the only genuine instance in literary history. In it, the elements of each tradition are blended so thoroughly that they become virtually impossible to separate, and this indeed is the novel's strength; *Esther Waters* is neither French nor Victorian but an amalgam of both as the novel wavered on the brink of becoming "modern." It marked, among other things, the most complete assimilation of naturalistic principles ever to take place in the English novel. Even then, as I have already noted, this assimilation did not constitute whole-hearted acceptance. As Frierson remarks, "Although the active controversy was ended by 1896, the popular acceptance of French naturalistic art in England cannot, after all, be said to have taken place . . . undiluted naturalism has never been congenial to the Anglo-Saxon temperament."[16]

I have already discussed in Chapter I the underlying reasons for this non-assimilation of naturalistic principles into the theory and practice of the English novel. They are partly summed up by Graham Hough when he notes that "moral ideas in England are commonly clearer and more strongly held than literary ones; a literary controversy tends to shift itself to the moral plane."[17] This was certainly true in 1894—*Esther Waters* was banned because of the sordid, "immoral" details surrounding the "lying-in" episode, and it was praised (by Prime Minister Gladstone in a telegram to the *Westminster Gazette*) because of the "moral good" those details provoked (The Fallowfield Corner Home for Homeless Children was founded because of the novel). This situation apparently remained unchanged in 1962, when Ian Gregor and Brian Nicholas published *The Moral and the Story*, a book whose critical bias illustrates Hough's point precisely.

In "The Case of *Esther Waters*," in which the novel is cited as "an interesting failure"[18] as opposed to the other novels discussed in their book,[19] Brian Nicholas points out the novel's "affinities with the French naturalist novel" and concludes that

> The obvious peculiarity of *Esther Waters* is that it is also a success story. Esther is both victim and victor, and the

> disparate approaches involved in such a presentation constitute a positive reason for the novel's failure.[20]

In other words, according to Nicholas, the English and French traditions cannot be successfully combined:

> The example of Moore at least serves to show up in a more positive light how consummately the French writers understood their art, how precise and exacting were their formulae—and also how irrelevant any sort of criticism must be which suggests that their novels would be the better for an injection of the English literary virtues. . . . Moore's example reminds us that, though the English novel learnt much from the French in terms of technical rigour and impersonality, their paths never really converged.[21]

Nicholas' argument has been successfully refuted at some length by Peter Ure[22] and, more succinctly, by Helmut Gerber:

> GM, Nicholas concludes, evades the problem of whether life or character is dominant. Perhaps it is necessary to say, first, that GM does not have to conclude that either the one or the other is dominant in a particular instance or in all instances to produce a moving and powerful novel about the conflict between life and character. Secondly, he does not insist that Esther is in the grips of *irresistible* social and psychological forces. . . . Thirdly, the conflict is resolved, although mutedly, without sentimentality, and without a noisy victory celebration. Esther does resist; the life-forces are not irresistible. What Nicholas does not seem to recognize is that in most of his novels GM was more interested in the problem than in the answer. . . .[23]

These are cogent objections; I do not intend to deal with Nicholas' argument, therefore, except obliquely. Instead, I would like to look at what Nicholas sees as the novel's "predictable but unhappy combination": "a blending of the naturalistic, the formally artistic and the ethical."[24] It is obviously the first and last of these attributes that Nicholas finds to be mutually exclusive; the "ethical" (and by this Nicholas apparently means "English") tradition has no business infringing on the naturalistic. I will deal with these two sets of characteristics first, then, and conclude with a discussion of the "formally artistic" aspects of the novel.

2. Naturalistic Elements

I have already remarked that the various elements of *Esther Waters* are "blended so thoroughly that they become virtually impossible to separate." This is so, but the attempt to identify them yields interesting results and helps to evaluate the novel on its own merits.

One of the most naturalistic aspects of *Esther Waters* is its verisimilitude, first lauded by Arthur Quiller-Couch in the *Speaker* when the book appeared in 1894. He compares the novel to *Tess* and finds that Esther's story is "the most artistic, the most complete, and the most inevitable work of fiction that has been written in England for at least two years." His reasons are as follows:

> For in effect, it comes to this:—The story of Tess, in which attention is so urgently directed to the hand of Destiny, is not felt to be inevitable, but freakish. The story of Esther Waters, in which a poor servant-girl is allowed to grapple with her destiny and, after a fashion, to defeat it, is felt . . . to be absolutely inevitable.[25]

This was the beginning of a continuing critical comparison of *Esther Waters* and *Tess*. In 1909 Forrest Reid, possibly unaware of

Quiller-Couch's review, makes the same point for precisely the same reasons:

> In spite of her ignorance and violent temper she is one of the finest women in fiction. Experience comes to her much as it came to Mr. Hardy's Tess, but her subsequent life is utterly different. Tess is a mere puppet in the hands of ironic divinites of whom the reader cannot help thinking Mr. Hardy is one, so unconvincing and arbitrary are several of the episodes; and if there is nothing in "Esther Waters" which rises to the poetical height of certain passages in the earlier novel (Mr. Moore, be it said at once—we have his own word for it—is quite incapable even of understanding that supreme imaginative beauty which characterizes Mr. Hardy's work at its best) it cannot be denied that it gets closer to life, and that there are also none of those coincidences of which Mr. Hardy is so fond. "Esther Waters" seems to me to be the result of an absolutely sane vision of life. Nothing is heightened, nothing emphasized for the sake of a tragic effect. The story is full of the cruelty of life, and yet there is in it no more trace of pessimism than there is of optimism. Had Mr. Hardy written Esther's story he would have made her fail as he makes everyone fail. Mr. Moore makes her succeed, and the book, to my sense, rings absolutely true.[26]

A still more modern critic, Granville Hicks, is also in full agreement: "It is unfair, perhaps, to compare it with *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for Hardy was writing high tragedy, but, if the comparison is made, *Esther Waters* seems the more nearly perfect achievement. If it never moves the reader as *Tess* does, it never irritates with incredibilities or irrelevances."[27]

This acclaim for *Esther Waters*' verisimilitude is well-founded. The creation of a particular milieu, the frankness of detail and the credibility of the main character and what happens to her are all very "real." An examination of these aspects of the novel, which I shall now undertake, reveals a subtle blend of both naturalistic and Victorian elements.

Moore's method of gathering information for *Esther Waters* remained as thoroughly Zolaesque as it had been in writing *A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin*. Eliza Aria recounts how Moore visited a hospital and took notes for the "lying-in" episode[28] (and probably for the sanitarium episode as well, we might imagine). For the milieu of the racing-stables, Moore needed no research, for this was the milieu of his childhood at Moore Hall; perhaps this is what makes the rendering of it so unforced, even in comparison to the thoroughly believable world of the theatre company in *A Mummer's Wife*.[29]

As in that novel, the reader is introduced to the foreign milieu by the same slow degrees as the main character. Like Kate, Esther is at first confused by the activities going on around her, and particularly by the racing jargon which the other characters constantly speak. In the very first scene, before she even reaches Woodview, she hears some of this strange language spoken by William:

> "Jim Story got the sack about a week ago. When he had taken a drop he'd tell every blessed thing that was done in the stables. They'd get him down to the 'Red Lion' for the purpose; of course the squire couldn't stand that." . . .
>
> "You won't catch me chattering over the bar at the 'Red Lion' and having every blessed word I say wired up to London and printed next morning in all the papers."
>
> Esther wondered what he was talking about. . . .[30]

This is reminiscent of Kate's first meetings with Dick, of which the narrator remarked, "The worm does not easily realize the life of the fly, and Kate did not understand. The rapidly stated facts whirled and bewildered her. . . ." (77). Alice, a more intelligent character whose awareness coincides with that of the Victorian omniscient narrator in *A Drama in Muslin*, is (needless to say) never so confused as either Kate or Esther, both of whom are more naturalistic characters.

In *Esther Waters*, as in *A Mummer's Wife*, the reader and the main character slowly become accustomed to the technicalities of this new world. Like the jargon of the theatre, none of the racing jargon is ever explained by the narrator, and the overall effect is one of authenticity, both of the milieu and of the heroine's response to it. We sympathize with Esther's puzzlement, for example, when she has lunch with the other servants for the first time and is seated next to one of the jockeys:

> She learnt, too, that "The Demon" was not the real name of the little carroty-haired boy, and she looked at him in amazement when he whispered in her ear that he would dearly love a real go-in at that pudding, but that it was so fattening that he didn't ever dare to venture on more than a couple of sniffs. Seeing that the girl did not understand, he added, by way of explanation, "You know that I must keep under the six stone, and at times it becomes awful 'ard."
>
> Esther thought him a nice little fellow, and tried to persuade him to forego his resolution not to touch pudding, until Mr. Swindles told her to desist. The attention of the whole table being thus drawn towards the boy, Esther was still further surprised at the admiration he seemed so easily to command and the important position he seemed to occupy, notwithstanding his diminutive stature, whereas the bigger boys were treated with very little consideration. (13-14)

Gradually, however, both Esther and the reader come to take the habits and language of this milieu for granted. At the end of Chapter

5, when the gloomy Mrs. Latch tells Esther about a servant drowning himself over the loss of all his money in a race, Esther's reply indicates the extent to which she has become acclimatized to her world:

> "John Randal has that man's death on his conscience. . . ."
> "Perhaps he didn't know the 'orse was scratched."
> "I see you are falling in nicely with the lingo of the trade."
> "Oh," replied Esther, laughing; "one never hears anything else; one picks it up without knowing." (34-35)

This gradual and complete knowledge of a particular vivid environment becomes one of the deeper principles of the rhythm of the novel. Esther leaves Woodview in disgrace; but later, when she rejoins William and goes with him to run the King's Head pub, the recurrence of the familiar betting jargon seems like "home" and helps to influence Esther in her decision:

> "Look 'ere, Esther," he said, laying his hand on the area gate. "You won't refuse to come out with me some Sunday. I've half a share in the public-house, the 'King's Head,' and have been backing winners all this year. I've plenty of money to treat you. I should like to make it up to you. Perhaps you've 'ad rather a 'ard time. What 'ave yer been doing all these years? I want to hear." (169)

Esther slips back into this environment very easily, and certainly the reader does not blame her. Like the world of "opera-bouffé" in *A Mummer's Wife*, the world of horseracing is presented as having an overall vitality which overshadows its uncertainty as a means of making a living. J. M. Kennedy's claim in 1912 that the novel's purpose is to illustrate the evils of gambling, for instance, strikes the modern reader as ludicrous.[31] Certainly the lives of the characters are adversely affected by betting: Sarah goes to jail, William loses his pub and Woodview falls into ruin. Mrs. Randal's lament to Esther near the beginning of the novel is echoed in various ways throughout:

> "If Silver Braid is beaten we are ruined. Indeed, I don't know what will become of us. For fifteen years I have borne up; I have lived on little at the best of times, and very often have gone without; but that is nothing compared to the anxiety—to see him [Mr. Randal] come in with a white face, to see him drop into a chair and hear him say, 'Beaten a head on the post,' or 'Broke down, otherwise he would have won in a canter.' I have always tried to be a good wife and tried to console him, and to do the best when he said, 'I have lost half a year's wages, I don't know how we shall pull through.' I have borne with ten thousand times more than I can tell you. The sufferings of a gambler's wife cannot be told." (46)

On the other hand, William's impassioned defense of betting in reply to Esther's disapproval also has the ring of truth:

> "It is the betting that brings the business; we shouldn't take five pounds a week was it not for the betting. What's the difference between betting on the course and betting in the bar? No one says nothing against it on the course; the police is there, and they goes after the welshers and persecutes them. Then the betting that's done at Tattersall's and the Albert Club, what is the difference? The Stock Exchange, too, where thousands and thousands is betted every day. It is the old story—one law for the rich and another for the poor. Why shouldn't the poor man 'ave his 'alf-crown's worth of excitement? The rich man can have his thousand pounds' worth whenever he pleases. (258)

The narrator himself refrains from commenting in his own voice on the morality of gambling one way or the other, except in the scene in which Sarah is tried for theft, in which he appears to endorse William's view. The irony in that scene is heavy-handed and clumsy, and constitutes a flaw in the novel's otherwise carefully impartial narration:

> "The race in question is, I think, called the Cesarewitch, and the name of the horse (lordship had lost three hundred on Ben Jonson), if my memory serves me right (here lordship fumbled amid papers), yes, the name is, as I thought, Ben Jonson . . . ." And lordship's losses on the horse whose name he could hardly recall helped to a forcible illustration of the theory that drink and gambling mutually uphold and enforce each other. When the news that Ben Jonson had broken down at the bushes came in, lordship had drunk a magnum of champagne, and memory of this champagne inspired a telling description of the sinking feeling consequent on the loss of wager, and the natural inclination of a man to turn to drink to counteract it. . . . Lordship then glanced at the trembling woman in the dock. He condemned her to eighteen months' hard labour, and gathering up the papers on the desk, dismissed her for ever from his mind. (278-79)

Far more effective than this obtrusive commentary in presenting the evils and attractions of horseracing are the events and descriptions of the tale itself: on the one hand, the character's lives are all ruined, to some extent, by betting; on the other hand, the excitement of the sport is portrayed in glowing detail. Even a reader who has never attended a horserace is bound to be caught up in the suspense of Mr. Leopold's description of the finish of Silver Braid's race, for example:

> "Well, approaching the stand, I noticed that Silver Braid was not going quite so fast, and at the very instant the Demon looked over his shoulder, and seeing he was losing ground he took up the whip. But the moment he struck him the horse swerved right across the course, right under the stand, running like a rat from underneath the whip. The Demon

> caught him one across the nose with his left hand, but seeing what was 'appening, the Tinman, who was on Bullfinch, sat down and began riding. I felt as if there was a lump of ice down my back . . . I thought it was all over," he said, "and the Gaffer thought the same; I never saw a man go so deadly pale. . . . The Tinman was riding splendid, getting every ounce and something more out of Bullfinch. The Demon, too weak to do much, was sitting nearly quite still. It looked as if it was all up with us, but somehow Silver Braid took to galloping of his own accord, and 'aving such a mighty lot in 'and he won on the post by a 'ead—a short 'ead. . . . I never felt that queer in my life and the Gaffer was no better. . . ." (49-50)

No doubt the horseracing milieu is an instance of what Helmut Gerber means when he says that "When his ambivalence on a given subject is identical or nearly identical with the thematic conflicts, the result is often a heightening of the fictional drama and usually a greater sense of GM's own sympathetic commitment. *Esther* is a book of this kind. . . ."[32]

The scene in *Esther Waters* of which Moore was proudest (and which he claimed to have revised forty times), the Derby-Day scene, also displays the excitement that is connected with the races. To some extent this description was a technical experiment for Moore—it was to contain "no racing, only the sweat and boom of the crowd—the great Cockney holiday"[33]—but it is also one of the most vivid scenes in the novel. William's loud bookmakers's suit ("each square of black and white nearly as large as a sixpence . . . the green tie was a yard of flowing sea-green silk" [227]), the boy on eight-foot stilts ("He uttered short warning cries from time to time, held out his wide trousers and caught pennies in his conical cap" [232]) and the men asleep in the sun ("They lay with their hats over their faces, clay pipes sticking from under the brims, their brown-red hands upon the grey grass " [232]) all contribute to the holiday atmosphere. Mainly, however, the scene is rendered in terms of Esther's perceptions:

> The sun had risen high, and what clouds remained floated away like filaments of white cotton. The Grand Stand, dotted like a ceiling with flies, stood out distinct and harsh upon a burning plain of blue. The light beat fiercely upon the booths, the carriages, the vehicles, the "rings," the various stands. The country around was lost in the haze and dazzle of the sunlight; but a square mile of downland fluttered with flags and canvas, and the great mob swelled, and smoked, and drank, shied sticks at Aunt Sally, and rode wooden horses. . . . Both women fell asleep under the shade of their parasols. It was the shallow, glassy sleep of the open air, through which they divined easily the great blur that was the race-course. (233-34)

The "panoramic" quality of the whole scene is further emphasized in the description of the crowd's departure at the end:

> It was like the instinct of departure which takes a vast herd at a certain moment. The great landscape, half country, half suburb, glinted beneath the rays of a setting sun; and through the white dust, and the drought of the warm roads, the brakes and carriages and every crazy vehicle rolled towards London; orange-sellers, tract-sellers, thieves, vagrants, gipsies, made for their various quarters—roadside inns, outhouses, hayricks, hedges, or the railway station. Down the long hill the vast crowd made its way, humble pedestrians and carriage folk, all together, as far as the cross-roads. (239)

In contrast to the exotic "Huysmanesque" style of description he employed in *A Drama in Muslin*, Moore shows great restraint in describing this scene. The effect of the whole is one of immediacy and excitement, and the perils of gambling illustrated in the events of the novel pale by comparison. Brian Nicholas complains that "The whole fifty pages . . . remain a detachable impression, unrelated to the main theme and therefore not rising above the level of . . . the picturesque,"[34] but it is difficult to see how this is so. Nicholas is chagrined at "Esther's immunity" in the scene (it is her friend Sarah who comes to no good at the Derby), but surely Esther's fortunes are as closely connected to gambling as those of the other characters. Presumably if William had caught his fatal chill at the Derby instead of later on in the book, Nicholas would have found the scene to be thematically significant, "the dramatic framed in the characteristic." As it is, life does not always work out so neatly or symbolically, and Moore does not pretend that it does. In depicting such a morally-charged milieu as that of horseracing and presenting both sides of the question fairly and without overt commentary, Moore's authorial code is obviously the naturalistic one of describing rather than judging.[35] The degree to which he succeeds in this aim is an instance of William Newton's assertion that Moore sometimes exhibits naturalistic traits "in purer . . . form" than in the works of the naturalists themselves.[36] The Grand Prix scene in *Nana*, for instance (a more apt comparison than Nicholas' suggestions of either Flaubert's description of the agricultural show in *Madame Bovary* or Zola's description of the birthday dinner in *L'Assommoir*) is saturated with covert moral judgment in comparison with the Derby-Day scene. Lilian Furst, who makes an extended comparison of these two scenes (unfavourable to Moore) in "George

Moore, Zola, and the Question of Influence," remarks that "Moore seems to disappear behind his characters; Zola, on the contrary, is there . . . to observe, describe and animate. The impression of an absent narrator is also indirectly fostered by the fact that the racing is never described."[37]

The scrupulous accuracy with which the horseracing milieu is created, then, is one feature of *Esther Waters* which could be described as "naturalistic." Another is its unflinching frankness about "unpleasant" physical details. Nothing so unpleasant as Kate's drinking, vomiting[38] or final illness occurs, however, even though Esther comes from a lower social class than Kate and could lend herself to "animalistic" descriptions more easily, presumably; *A Mummer's Wife* was distinctly more naturalistic in this respect. By the time he wrote *Esther Waters* Moore had learned from Pater that "by a certain avoidance of the wilfully passionate, and the surely ugly, we may secure an aspect of temporal life which is abiding and soul-sufficing."[39] Also, he no longer felt the desire to "épater le bourgeois," so that no unpleasantness is dwelt on for its own sake.

Neither are such matter-of-fact realities shirked or glossed over, however. Esther's life, like Tess's, hinges on things that are indubitably physical; Esther cannot even read. When William contracts tuberculosis, for example, it is concrete realities with which she has to cope. Unlike Jude (and countless other Victorian heroes and heroines who expire soulfully, exhibiting few symptoms apart from sighing and growing pale),[40] William is made to face the painful weaknesses of the body:

> William was lying in his bed, seemingly at death's door. He had remained out late one evening, had caught cold, and his mouth was constantly filled with blood. . . . Esther wiped away the little drops of sweat as they came upon his forehead; his chest and throat had to be wiped also, for they too were full of sweat. . . . She gave him a little brandy-and-water, and when he could not take it from the glass she gave it to him with a spoon. (302, 316)

The sanitarium, too, contains horrors viewed unsqueamishly by the narrator and courageously by Esther:

> There were benches along the walls; and emaciated and worn-out men lay on the long cane chairs in the windowed recesses by which the passage was lighted. The wards, containing sometimes three, sometimes six or seven beds, opened on to this passage. The doors of the wards were all open, and as she passed along she started at the sight of a boy sitting up in bed. His head had been shaved and only a slight bristle covered the crown. The head and face were a large white mass with two eyes. (305-06)

The matter-of-fact depiction of these sordid realities undoubtedly reflects the naturalists' influence on Moore. Instead of being thrust relentlessly at the reader throughout the novel, however (as such details are in many of Zola's novels and in the last third of *A Mummer's Wife*), they form a necessary part of its fabric. Without them, Esther's struggle would lose its meaning and she herself would lose the down-to-earth quality which distinguishes her from many contemporary Victorian heroines.

It was not the graphic descriptions of William's illness which caused the book to be banned by Smith's, however (resulting in a loss to the library of £1500, as Moore gleefully noted).[41] Instead, as one might guess, it was the direct descriptions in several scenes which bordered on a violation of the great Victorian taboo of sex that were considered offensive.

Esther's pregnancy and the events surrounding the "lying-in" episode, in particular, were considered to be unsuitable reading for young ladies. Certainly they are more graphically depicted than similar episodes in any other English fiction of the time, and here a comparison to *Tess* is instructive. The instant when Esther realizes she is pregnant is related, for instance:

> She did not think—her mind was lost in vague sensation of William, and it was in this death of active memory that something awoke within her, something that seemed to her like a flutter of wings; her heart seemed to drop from its socket, and she nearly fainted away, but recovering herself she stood by the kitchen table, her arms drawn back and pressed to her sides, a death-like pallor over her face, and drops of sweat on her forehead. The truth was borne in upon her; she realised in a moment part of the awful drama that awaited her, and from which nothing could free her, and which she would have to live through hour by hour. (71-72)

This passage is revealing in several ways. First of all, it illustrates clearly Moore's handling of Esther's consciousness. She is certainly not as self-aware a character as Alice Barton, and in fact the "vague sensation" and "death of active memory" in the opening lines seem to resemble Kate Ede's dreaminess. But Esther becomes aware—sharply aware, in fact—not only of her plight but also of the "hour by hour" duration of it stretching ahead of her. The personal tragedy of the "awful drama" is implicit in the tone of the whole passage: the word "death" is mentioned twice, and the "flutter of wings" carries with it the implied image of the angel of death. The unromantic word "socket" prevents the passage from becoming too plangent, however, and while there is nothing really very direct about the "flutter of wings" and "her heart seemed to drop from its socket"—in fact the whole description seems fairly evasive to a modern reader—at least the moment *is* described, unlike Tess's realization. The closest the reader comes to the latter is the oblique remark that "She had no fear of [Alex] now, and in the cause of her confidence her sorrow lay."[42] Tess appears to be conscious of shame but not of much else; it would seem that Hardy keeps her resolutely innocent, as befits a "pure" woman. Similarly, the churchgoers' gossip about Tess is only mentioned in passing ("The people who had turned their heads turned them again as the service proceeded; and at last observing her they whispered to each other. She knew what their whispers were about, grew sick at heart, and felt that she could come to church no more"),[43] while the taunts of Esther's stepfather are recorded in direct and painful detail:

> "Wot do yer say? Esther in trouble? Well, that's the best bit I've heard this long while. I always told ye that the religious ones were just the same as the others—a bit more hypocritical, that's all. . . . Well I never! But 'tis just what I always suspected. The goody-goody sort are the worst. So she 'as got 'erself into trouble! Well, she'll 'ave to get 'erself out of it." (89)

An even better contrast between the two novels can be seen in the heroines' confessions to their respective mothers. While Esther tells her mother bluntly, "I had to leave. . . . I'm seven months gone" (80), Tess, we are told, "went up to her mother, put her face upon Joan's neck, and told."[44] This scene, in fact, is analogous to the later confessions which both women make to their new lovers. The way in which Hardy handled Tess's confession to Angel angered Moore unbearably. Malcolm Brown tells us that "When Moore was pressed for evidence to support his charges, he would invariably cite as Hardy's unpardonable aesthetic sin the scene in which Tess confesses her past sins to Angel Clare, a scene that so deeply imprinted itself in Moore's mind, that it supplied him with daily conversation for forty years."[45] Moore's objection was that "Any writer . . . would be unable to avoid the knowledge that the whole thing depended on the handling of the incident. Now, mark what Hardy does. The husband is sitting in a chair, his wife at his knees; and then in a few pages, and in the third person, Hardy disposes of it all. This incident, to which everything should lead up, which we should never be allowed to overlook, is over almost as soon as we realise it has begun."[46] Here is the passage to which Moore so strenuously objected:

> Pressing her forehead against his temple she entered on the story of her acquaintance with Alec D'Urberville and its results, murmuring the words without flinching, and with her eyelids drooping down.[47]

Certainly Esther minces no words when discussing the same matter with Fred, her prospective suitor:

> "I suppose I'd better tell you. I'm not the good woman you think me. I've got a child. There, you have it now, and you can take your hook when you like." (161)

True to his objections, there is no third-person softening of the blow for Moore; Esther confesses her "fault" directly and, we may note, with none of Tess's embarrassment. In these two confessions, in fact, are revealed the contrasting personalities and modes of presentation of these two servant-girls. Tess is completely passive, as she is throughout the novel, while Esther takes the situation into her own hands; also, Tess "murmurs" her story with a becoming modesty of demeanor, "her eyelids drooping down," while Esther is uncompromisingly blunt. Esther is in every way a more immediate character than Tess, who remains remote, ethereal, stylized, or, as Ian Gregor puts it, "an innocent and wronged ballad heroine."[48] It can easily be seen why critics have seen more verisimilitude in *Esther Waters* than in *Tess*. Esther is not only more "realistic," in that servants like her were far more likely to exist than servants like Tess, but she is also more fully "realized" in that she is presented to the reader much more directly and completely.

There is, significantly, no episode in *Tess* which corresponds to the actual "lying-in" episode which caused the libraries so much discomfiture over *Esther Waters*. Moore researched the details of this episode carefully. In his review of Zola's *La Debacle* in 1892, one of his complaints was that "The hospital scenes are good but not excellent. Sensation of the margin of life is not there; and we do not inhale the chloroform, we do not see the steel instruments. . . ."[49] If Moore set out to remedy these deficiencies, he succeeded admirably. Unlike the birth in *A Mummer's Wife* (which was related from Dick's point of view) and the birth in *A Drama in Muslin* (which was related from May's point of view but cursorily and indirectly, in a letter), Esther's confinement is related from her own point of view and at some length. First, the surroundings of the hospital are described as they are seen by the terrified Esther:

> On the second landing a door was thrown open, and she found herself in a room full of people, eight or nine young men and women.
>
> "What! in there? and all those people?" said Esther.
>
> "Of course; those are the midwives and the students."
>
> She saw that the screams she had heard in the passage came from a bed on the left-hand side. A woman lay there huddled up. In the midst of her terror Esther was taken behind a screen by the sister who had brought her upstairs and quickly undressed. She was clothed in a chemise a great deal too big for her, and a jacket which was also many sizes too large. . . . Both windows were wide open, and as she walked across the room she noticed the basins on the floor, the lamp on the round table, and the glint of steel instruments.
>
> The students and the nurses were behind her; she knew they were eating sweets, for she heard a young man ask the young women if they would have any more fondants. Their chatter and laughter jarred on her nerves; but at that moment her pains began again and she saw the young man whom she had seen handing the sweets approaching her bedside.
>
> "Oh, no, not him, not him!" she cried to the nurse. "Not him, not him! he is too young! Do not let him come near me!" (102-03)

All of these details—the screaming woman, the hospital garb, the steel instruments and the cavalier attitude of the medical students—create an impression of immediacy which is a far cry from the usual Victorian off-stage description of a birth. Even the labour of poor Fanny in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which *is* related from her point of view, glosses over the physical details and is sentimentalized by the portrayal of the faithful dog who assists her in her walk to the poorhouse.

Another aspect of Esther's motherhood which alarmed the censors was the forthright description of her nursing her baby:[50]

> At that moment Esther's baby awoke crying for the breast. The little lips caught at the nipple, the wee hand pressed the white curve, and in a moment Esther's face took that expression of holy solicitude which Raphael sublimated in the Virgin's downward-gazing eyes. (108)

Again, a comparison with the corresponding scene in *Tess* will demonstrate just how graphic (albeit idealistic) Moore's description is:

> Tess, with a curiously stealthy yet courageous movement, and with a still rising colour, unfastened her frock and began suckling the child.[51]

The difference in the effect of these two passages is curious. Moore's passage, with its "breast," "lips" and "nipple," is much more direct; yet Hardy's, with its overtones of embarrassment ("stealthy," "still rising colour"), is the more suggestive of the two. Indeed, this was a matter that was beginning to puzzle English critics at about this time: for all of their literal descriptions and sordid details, French naturalistic novels were hardly ever erotic.[52] (As Robert Buchanan pointed out in 1887, "If Zola is 'erotic,' then a demonstrator of morbid anatomy is a sensualist, and a human physiologist is a person of unclean proclivities.")[53] It is interesting, too, that both passages contain their own self-defence; but while Moore's defence is a reference to classic art, Hardy's consists in Tess's shame, which is far more seductive. Also, while Moore's passage focuses on the baby, Hardy's focuses on Tess as a woman "unfasten[ing] her frock."

William Faux, Smith's head librarian, explained why the library saw fit to ban *Esther Waters*, but not *Tess*, in the following way: "*Tess* is delicately inferential; *Esther Waters* is precisely positive. What is merely delicately inferred in the one, is bluntly told in the other."[54] In protesting the ban, William Archer, with shrewd insight, pointed out that "the author of *Tess* has introduced into English fiction a note of sensuality from which *Esther Waters* at any rate is entirely free."[55]

This "note of sensuality" indeed consists in something quite apart from the forthright rendition of physical details. As late as 1892, W.H. Mallock pointed out that "In the English fiction of today it is a universal rule that the men, and especially the women, with whom the reader is invited to sympathize, shall all stop short of one another at a certain point, whatever may be their dispositions or circumstances."[56] As I pointed out in Chapter I, this had been true throughout the Victorian period: sexual matters were not to be discussed directly. In circumventing this rule for so many decades, however, English novelists learned how to be sexually suggestive in a way that is doubtful whether their French counterparts ever did.[57] It is amusing, but not really surprising, for example, that Huysmans' Des Esseintes in trying to "cool his brain" by reading Dickens, finds that

> Mais ces volumes produisirent un effet contraire à celui qu'il attendait : ces chastes amoureux, ces héroïnes protestantes, vêtues jusqu'au cou, s'aimaient parmi les étoiles, se bournaient à basser les yeux, à rougir, à pleurer de bonheur, en se serrant les mains. Aussitôt cette exagération

> de pureté le lança dans un excès opposé; en vertue de la loi des contrastes, il sauta d'un extrême à l'autre, se rappela des scènes vibrantes et corsées, songea aux pratiques humanines des couples, aux baisers mélangés, aux baisers columbins, ainsi que les désigne la pudeur ecclésiastique, quand ils pénètrent entre les lèvres.

By the same token, Angel Claire carrying Tess across the flooded road is one of the most titillating scenes in English literature. Certainly nothing that practical, stoical Esther does with William approximates this level of eroticism.

If we compare the seduction episodes in the two novels, this tendency towards eroticism in *Tess* becomes even more apparent. Here is what happens between Esther and William:

> They lay together in the warm valleys, listening to the tinkling of the sheep-bell, and one evening, putting his pipe aside, William threw his arm round her, whispering that she was his wife. The words were delicious in her fainting ears, and her will died in what seemed like irresistible destiny. She could not struggle with him, though she knew that her fate depended upon her resistance, and swooning away she awakened in pain, powerless to free herself. . . . Soon after thoughts betook themselves on their painful way, and the stars were shining when we followed her across the down, beseeching her to listen. (61)

Although this description of lovemaking remains well within the Victorian "rule" outlined by Mallock--the physical actualities are neatly evaded by the phrase "swooning away she awakened in pain,"--it is, apart from the first sentence, related from Esther's point of view. Tess's experience, on the other hand, is related first of all from Alex's point of view and then by the narrator himself, reinforcing the impression of Tess's passivity:

> The obscurity was now so great that he could see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulousness at his feet, which represented the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves. Everything else was blackness alike. D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears.
>
> Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? . . .
>
> Why was it that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order.[59]

And later in the novel, we hear about the incident even more indirectly from two of Tess's fellow field-workers:

> "A little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o't, I reckon. There were they that heard a sobbing one night last year in The Chase; and it mid ha' gone hard wi' a certain party if folks had come along."[60]

Surely by comparison the recounting of Esther's experience is merely frank. Hardy's description, even though (or perhaps because) it is so indirect, creates a much more mysteriously sensual impression. The "pale nebulousness," the tears on Tess's eyelashes, the "beautiful feminine tissue" and the "coarse pattern" it receives, together with the belated report of "a sobbing one night last year in The Chase," combine to create a much more erotically allusive impression on the reader. George Steiner, in his discussion of sexuality in George Eliot's novels, intimates that such suggestiveness is inherent in the restraints of Victorian language, and I would agree:

> George Eliot's perceptions of sexual feeling, the closeness of observation she brings to bear on erotic sensibility and conflict, yield nothing to that of the moderns. In most instances what passes for characteristic post-Freudian insight is, by comparison, shallow. . . . Between the urgent wealth of felt life and the actual idiom of the novel there is a zone of silence, an area of conventional selection in which the novelist's responses—material, psychologically informed, canny as are any of the moderns—are translated into the temperance and conventional indirection of Victorian public speech.[61]

Moore's creation of milieu in *Esther Waters*, then, can in some respects be described as naturalistic—a particular way of life is carefully documented, and the physical realities of this way of life are dealt with head-on in a decidedly un-English sort of way. What distinguishes *Esther Waters* from any of Zola's novels, though, or even from the more thoroughly naturalistic *A Mummer's Wife*, is the overall mood of the novel, which is far from sordid. Collet refers to this mood as one that moves us "par sa simplicité, par sa pudeur, par une noblesse d'âme qui sont tout naturellement source de poésie" and pinpoints it as the characteristic that denotes "la distance qui sépare le réalisme anglais du naturalisme français."[62] Walter Allen, as well, feels that "the final impression the novel makes is one of beauty."[63]

This effect of "spirituality" or "nobility" derives partly from the fact that the more sordid details are never exploited for their own sake; they are simply incorporated into the novel as they arise. This is not the case in *A Mummer's Wife*, for example, in which the milieu after a certain point grows more and more depressing. Even the atmosphere of the lying-in episode—supposedly the most sordid event in *Esther Waters*—is alleviated by Esther's exquisitely-rendered rush of maternal feeling after her child is born:

> A pulp of red flesh rolled up in flannel was laid alongside of her. Its eyes were open; it looked at her, and her flesh filled with a sense of happiness so deep and so intense that she was like one enchanted. When she took the child in her arms she thought she must die of happiness. . . . Her personal self seemed entirely withdrawn; she existed like an atmosphere about the babe, an impersonal emanation of love. She lay absorbed in this life of her life, this flesh of her flesh, unconscious of herself as a sponge in warm sea-water. She touched this pulp of life, and was thrilled, and once more her senses swooned with love; it was still there. . . .
>
> She did not sleep. She could not sleep for thinking of him, and the long night passed in adoration. (105-06)

The fact that some of the details of this description (such as the imagery of "floating" and the later description of a woman close by screaming in labour) may have been "borrowed" from *Germinie Lacerteux* is unimportant; the overall mood of bliss which surrounds Moore's description has no parallel in the latter novel. It is quite impossible to doubt Moore's sincerity in such passages, even if one is unaware of his statement to Lena Milman that "I have just written the last page of *Esther Waters*—the two mothers living alone, tilling their garden and thinking of their sons. For the first time in my life I cried over my work."[64] David Christie Murray's contemporary comment on Moore's portrayal of motherly love, for instance, seems entirely unjustified:

> There are writers who have not a hundredth part of Mr. Moore's industry who would have moved the reader deeply with such a scene. But, if Mr. Moore feels at all, he is ashamed to show it. This mother-hunger is apparently just as affecting a thing to him as the position of the chest of drawers between the two windows—a fact made note of, and, therefore, to be chronicled.[65]

Katherine Mansfield, twenty-three years later, also accused Moore of a want of "emotion" in this regard ("To contemplate the object, to let it make its own impression—which is Mr. Moore's way in 'Esther Waters'—is not enough").[66]

Such critics, however, obviously harking back to a much more overt expression of emotional response on the part of the narrator, are not representative of the general critical response to *Esther Waters*. In fact, both Moore and his reading public seemed slightly surprised that he had written such a "moral" work. After all, this was the same Moore who had arrogantly asserted with Gautier that "the correction of form is the highest ideal";[67] who had proclaimed (however ironically), "What care I that some millions of wretched Israelites died under Pharoh's lash or Egypt's sun? It is well that they died that I might have the pyramids to look on. . . .";[68] and who had said coldly of "awful Emma" that "I was curious to know the depth of animalism you had sunk to, or rather out of which you had never been raised. . . .

Dickens would sentimentalize or laugh over you; I do neither, I merely recognize you as one of the facts of civilisation."[69]

This quality of abiding moral goodness in *Esther Waters*—what Brian Nicholas refers to as the "ethical" element—rests partly on the modification of the naturalists' determination to report all of the sordid details, as I have indicated. More particularly, however, it rests on the narrator's depiction of and relation to Esther herself. This is what I shall examine next, for therein lies the "moral" in the "story."

3. Ethical Elements

In choosing a servant as the heroine of his novel, Moore was following naturalistic principles even more closely than he had in *A Mummer's Wife*, whose heroine was from the more respectable lower-middle class. Hardy, too, chose a working-class heroine for *Tess*, but as Carol Ohmann remarks, "Moore scorned . . . Hardy's idealization of his milkmaid in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. In a sense, Moore was writing against that novel; his scullery maid would not prompt any hero to think of Arcadian ideals."[70]

Indeed, Moore's "scullery maid," the stolid, clumping Esther, is very different from the beautiful, "pure" Tess, who stands out among her companions like a rose among nettles. Esther is instead one of the nettles: her looks are unremarkable, she has a bad temper, she cannot read, she had none of the "finer" sensibilities and her concerns are very much those of a working-class girl (she determines not to leave

Woodview, for instance, until she has learned to make "jellies and gravies " [24]). She is much more typical of her class than Tess, and in this sense is undoubtedly more "realistic," as I have noted.

The pleasures which Esther and William share, for instance, bear no resemblance to the poetry and music with which Angel woos Tess. At the servants' ball, we read, "Neither Esther nor William knew how to waltz, but they tumbled round the room, enjoying themselves immensely" (59). Later in the novel, after the Derby, their whole company goes out to dinner at a restaurant, where they certainly act like servants:

> William had ordered champagne, but it had not proved to any one's taste except, perhaps, to Sarah, whom it rendered unduly hilarious; nor did the delicate food afford much satisfaction; the servants played with it, and left it on their plates; and it was not until William ordered up the saddle of mutton and carved it himself that the dinner began to take hold of the company. Esther and Sarah enjoyed the ices, and the men stuck to the cheese, a fine Stilton, which was much appreciated. Coffee no one cared for, and the little glasses of brandy only served to augment the general tipsiness. William hiccupped out an order for a bottle of Jamieson eight-year-old; but pipes were not allowed, and cigars were voted tedious, so they adjourned to the bar, where they were free to get as drunk as they pleased. (241)

In such passages the narrator obviously does his best to remain neutral, but there is an air of slight condescension in his very mention of the things his characters do not know or fail to enjoy. William's uncouth description of Italy contains a similar implied commentary:

> "That's down south. A beast of a place—nothing but sour wine, and all the cookery done in oil, and nothing to do

> but seeing picture-galleries. I got that sick of it I could stand it no longer, and I said, 'I've 'ad enough of this. I want to go home, where I can get a glass of Burton and a cut from the joint, and where there's a horse worth looking at.'" (177)

These passages are exceptions, however. Generally, the descriptions of Esther's and William's life together are reported quietly and straightforwardly. The very simplicity of the following, for example, overshadows its "lower class" aspects:

> William lit his pipe and unlaced his boots. Esther slipped on her night-dress and got into a large brass bedstead, without curtains. On the chest of drawers Esther had placed the books her mother had given her, and William had hung some sporting prints on the walls. He took his night-shirt from the pillow and put it on without removing his pipe from his mouth. He always finished his pipe in bed. (257-58)

Indeed, Esther's simplicity (another facet of the effect of *Marius* on Moore, who wrote to Jacques-Emile Blanche that "This book [*Marius*] is my idea of all that is beautiful and sweet")[71] is one of the novel's enormous strengths. It certainly contributes to the air of restraint and "classical repose" which several critics have praised. Esther is through and through the working girl; hence her explanation for "giving in" to William ("I shouldn't have touched the second glass of ale," [74]), is hardly "banal," as Malcolm Brown thinks[72] or "ludicrous," as Richard Cave thinks,[73] but merely honest. As Martin Seymour-Smith points out, "this of course is exactly what a girl like her *would* have said to a kind but morally strict woman like Mrs. Barfield. Those who ridicule the remark reject the sympathy, tolerance, and conscientious accuracy that Moore achieved in his portrayal."[74] Besides, this is not, as some critics have erroneously suggested, Esther's whole explanation. Her next statement—"I was in love with him, and you know what that is" (74)—is surely more significant, both to the reader's estimation of Esther's character and to her later "motive" in choosing William over Fred. In this connection, incidentally, Esther is certainly no less "pure" than Tess. While there is a suggestion of rape in Tess's seduction, she then commences to live with Alex for the next four months; whereas Esther, with her strong religious streak, refuses to speak to William afterwards, even though she loves him.

Esther's modest rewards—those of becoming a successful wife and mother—are similarly fitting to her lower-class character. It is enough for her, for example, when William treats her kindly, which is more than the other lower-class characters in the novel do for their wives. At the Derby, for instance, when Esther makes William's lunch,

> There was a nice piece of beef in the basket, and Esther cut several large sandwiches, buttering the bread thickly and adding plenty of mustard. When she brought them over William bent down and whispered—
> "My own duck of a wife, there's no one like her."
> Esther blushed and laughed with pleasure, and every trace of the resentment for the suffering he had occasioned her dropped out of her heart. For the first time he was really her husband; for the first time she felt that sense of unity in life which is marriage, and knew henceforth he was the one thing that she had to live for. (234)

This is hardly high romance, being based on such homely commodities as a "nice piece of beef" and "plenty of mustard"; but it is a satisfying and complete rendition of comfortable domesticity. Esther's mother, by contrast, has to put up with being endlessly bullied by her husband, as she recounts to Esther:

> "Well, I think he drinks more, and is even rougher. It was only the other day, just as I was attending to his dinner—it was a nice piece of steak, and it looked so nice that I cut off a weany piece to taste. He sees me do it, and he cries out, 'Now then, guts, what are you interfering with my dinner for?' I says, 'I only cut off a tiny piece to taste.' 'Well, then, taste that,' he says, and strikes me clean between the eyes. Ah, yes, lucky for you to be in service; you've half forgot by now what we've to put up with 'ere." (81)

As Esther's mother's speech shows, Moore used a modified Cockney dialect (the phonetic indications being limited to an occasional dropped "h," the substitution of "yer" for "you" and the addition of "s" to the present tense, as in "I sees") for the minor characters in the novel, as well as for Esther herself. This was undoubtedly in direct opposition to the habit he deplored in Hardy of having the rustic characters speak in a highly idiosyncratic dialect while the main characters speak in an unrealistically erudite fashion: "And now let me take you to a village where are gathered Hardy's peasants, or, rather, let Hardy take you there himself, and what will you find: all the rustics speaking subjectively, if they speak even intelligently. And the words! 'Now what dost ee think be the propinquity of that there church' . . . that sort of thing. I had forgotten Tess. As for her, she speaks in—well, metaphysics."[75] Indeed, Moore's criticism is justified, and his approximation of lower-class speech in *Esther Waters* does appear to have more verisimilitude than that in *Tess*. There is just enough dialect to remind us that Esther, like the other characters, is lower class, but not enough to distract us from the events of the novel.

The lower-class minor characters in *Esther Waters*, in fact, who all fare much worse than Esther, bear a close resemblance to many of the characters of "English naturalism," which was in full swing at the time. Esther's sister Jenny ("I didn't mean that I was a-going on the streets right away this very evening, only that a girl left alone in London without anyone to look to may go wrong in spite of herself, as it were " [110]) bears definite affinities to "Lizerunt," and surely the street where Esther's friend Sarah used to live is just as "mean" as Morrison's:

> The courts and alleys had vomited their population into the Lane. Fat girls clad in shawls sat around in the slum opening nursing their babies. Old women crouched in decrepit doorways, fumbling their aprons; skipping ropes whirled in the roadway. A little higher up a vendor of cheap ices had set up his store and was rapidly absorbing all the pennies of the neighborhood. Esther and Sarah turned into a dilapidated court, where a hag argued the price of trotters with a family leaning one over the other out of a second-floor window. . . .
>
> "That's where we used to live," said Sarah, pointing up to the third floor. . . . "I remember pawning a dress over the way in the lane; they would only lend me a shilling on it. And you see that shop—the shutters is up, it being Sunday; it is a sort of butcher's, cheap meat, livers and lights, trotters, and such-like. I bought a bullock's heart there, and stewed it down with some potatoes; we did enjoy it, I can tell you." (262)

The implied social indignation in the descriptions of the lives the poor are forced to live, which constitutes part of the ethical dimension of the novel, gives such scenes a markedly "English" flavour. The "sweat shop" occupation of Esther's sisters, for instance, seems like something straight out of Dickens or Mrs. Gaskell:

> "If it wasn't for Jenny and Julia I don't think we should ever make both ends meet; but they works all day at the dogs, and at the warehouse their dogs is said to be neater and more lifelike than any other. Their poor fingers is worn away cramming the paper into the moulds; but they never complains, no more shouldn't I if he was a bit gentler, and didn't take more than half of what he earns to the public-'ouse. I was glad you was away, Esther, for you allus was of an 'asty temper and couldn't 'ave borne it. I don't want to make my troubles seem worse than they be, but sometimes I think I will break up, 'special when I get to thinking what will become of us and all them children, money growing less and expenses increasing. I haven't told yer, but I daresay you have noticed that another one is coming. It is the children that breaks us poor women down altogether." (81-82)

The baby-farmer, the sinister Mrs. Spires, also seems "Dickensian," even down to her name. She attempts to comfort Esther about the possible loss of her baby in the following way:

> "You girls is all alike, yer thinks of nothing but yer babies for the first few weeks, then yer tires of them, the drag on yer is that 'eavy—I knows yer—and then yer begins to wish they 'ad never been born, or yer wishes they had died afore they knew they was alive. I don't say I'm not often sorry for them, poor little dears, but they takes less notice than you'd think for, and they is better out of the way; they really is, it saves a lot of trouble hereafter. I often do think that to neglect them, to let them go off quiet, that I be their best friend; not wilful neglect, yer know, but what is a woman to do with ten or a dozen, and I often 'as as many? I am sure they'd thank me for it." (129)

Possibly Moore had such scenes in mind when he claimed that *Esther Waters* was to be "Pecksniff, done seriously, and, if the feat does not seem impossible, with love."[76] In fact, as W. C. Frierson points out, Dickens would not have painted quite such a grim picture:

> When Dickens portrayed a thief, a rogue, or a gravedigger he presented him as an individual, an oddity, not a type. The social order, sound except for specified abuses, contained quite a few scoundrels, but nice people in any locality were not very far away. Then, too, the atmosphere of poverty in Dickens' works was not necessarily malign. Some of the most admirable people were poor. Depravity among rich and poor was present but it was exceptional; the social organization was askew here and there but a fundamental good order prevailed.[77]

Gissing has often been posited as the link between the sentimental and the serious treatments of the poor in the English novel; but Moore's influence was just as great. Gissing's characters, while they undergo the hardships of poverty, remain "idealized" rather than realistic, clinging to their shabby gentility like the "odd women," or to their education like Thyrza and Gilbert Grail.

In any event, it is obvious that the minor characters in *Esther Waters*, as well as Moore's treatment of them, are firmly within the English fictional tradition. The naturalists, while they undoubtedly had what Furst and Skrine refer to as a hidden "socialist motive of moral indignation,"[78] were never so sympathetic to their characters' plights (partly because the characters' heredity was just as much to blame as their poverty, presumably, and partly because of their commitment to the "scientific" approach, which necessitated what Hough refers to as "the paralysing stance of utter detachment").[79] Furst also maintains that "What matters is to recognize there are two differing traditions on opposite sides of the Channel. And Moore's *Esther Waters* stands fair and square in the English tradition. . . . Moore treats in this novel several typically Victorian subjects, . . we are indeed not far from Dickens' social consciousness."[80] As I have already pointed out, there were similar scenes of poverty in *A Drama in Muslin,* rendered with a similar degree of social indignation. But in that novel such scenes consisted of a dark "backdrop" for the main plot, while in *Esther Waters* they are fully integrated into the main plot itself. It is Esther's family who has a drunken father, Esther's best friend who goes to jail for stealing and Esther's husband who loses his business as a result of betting. Esther herself comes close to the workhouse in her grim struggle, and when William dies she is again a poverty-stricken servant:

> Esther and the children—the landlord was a widower—slept in the coffee-room upon planks laid across the tops of the high backs of the benches where the customers mealed. Mattresses and bedding were laid on these planks and the sleepers lay, their faces hardly two feet from the ceiling. Esther slept with the baby, a little boy of five; the two big boys slept at the other end of the room by the front door. (319)

It is because we care about Esther, of course, that such scenes move us more than any of the horrors of poverty that Gervaise is subjected to, for instance. The degree to which we care about her, and why, is the crux of Brian Nicholas' objection to what he sees as the "moral duality" of the novel. He complains that "If Esther is disqualified by her will as a naturalistic heroine she is also pallid as an autonomous personality. . . . Esther forfeits Gervaise's status of representative victim without achieving that of an intrinsically interesting individual."[81] He also speaks of Esther's "odd, makeshift portrayal" and concludes that "The naturalist novel can extend downwards to the portrayal of mass victimization, but in doing so it must . . . shift its emphasis from the individual to the epic and panoramic. *Esther Waters* is the proof that it cannot move upwards, even in a small degree, towards the world of personal responsibility."[82]

In other words, Nicholas sees *Esther Waters* both as a failed naturalist novel and as a failed English novel because Esther is more of a "character" than Gervaise, but less of a "character" than Tess, thus obscuring the moral orientation of the novel. This is precisely the discrepancy that Walter Allen refers to in his comments about French and English notion of character which I referred to in Chapter I ("The Naturalist theory stressed an attitude towards character endemic to French novelists but rare in English. . . . English novelists have always tended to see their imaginary persons as eccentric persons. . . . The French, however, rarely see their characters as 'characters'").[83]

As I have already pointed out, Esther is certainly more representative of a certain "type" of servant than Tess is, for example. But does that make her "pallid" and "makeshift" as Nicholas suggests? How well do we get to "know" Esther in comparison with Kate Ede or Alice Barton, for example? Certainly her lower-class origins and limited intelligence would make it relatively easy for both the narrator and the reader to "look down" on her, which would cause the "morality" of the novel merely to consist in pity for the likes of Esther. But this does not happen; why not? Nicholas is accurate in seeing the presentation of Esther's character as the moral "key" to the novel; but he is inaccurate in his assessment of that presentation, which I will now examine in detail.

The narrator who presents Esther to us is even more completely effaced than the highly objective narrator in *A Mummer's Wife,* who, while he rarely commented directly on Kate's character, gave the reader many naturalistic "analyses" of her situation. The narrator in *Esther Waters* generally refrains from such commentary about Esther. He does once refer to "the noble instincts which were intrinsically Esther Waters'" (303), and there is also the much-quoted passage in which he reflects that

> Hers is an heroic adventure if one considers it—a mother's fight for the life of her child against all the forces that civilisation arrays against the lowly and the illegitimate. She is in a situation to-day, but on what security does she hold it? She is strangely dependent on her own health, and still more upon the fortunes and the personal caprice of her employers. . . . (145)

The novel as a whole, however, is remarkably free from authorial moralizing. Other narrative comments, far from individualizing Esther, also take pains to ensure that she is identified with countless other working girls in her position. Before she goes to Woodview, for example, we are told that

> In grimy lodging-houses she worked from early morning till late at night, scrubbing grates, preparing bacon and eggs, cooking chops, and making beds. She had become one of those London girls to whom rest, not to say pleasure, is unknown, . . . (22)

Later, when she leaves Woodview after becoming pregnant, we see her on the train:

> She had come to Woodview to escape the suffering of a home which had become unendurable, and she was going back in circumstances a hundred times worse than those in which she had left it, and she was going back with the memory of the happiness she had lost. All the grief and trouble that girls of her class have so frequently to bear gathered in Esther's heart when she looked out of the railway carriage window and saw for the last time the stiff plantations on the downs and the angles of the Italian house between the trees. She drew her handkerchief from her jacket, and hid her distress as well as she could from the other occupants of the carriage. (78-79)

(The latter, incidentally, one of the few "sentimental" descriptions in the novel, is a good example of what Martin Seymour-Smith means when he refers to Moore's ability to "touch the heart without jerking the tears.")[84] This careful portrayal of Esther as a "type" as well as an individual is undoubtedly a naturalistic characteristic, but it would also appear to be yet another result of Moore's reading of *Marius*; in *Avowals* he says with admiration that Pater "wrote more about humanity than character" and "was not writing about any individual but about mankind."[85] The lack of this representative or universal quality constitutes another of Quiller-Couch's criticisms of *Tess*: "Tess's curse does not lie by nature on all women; nor on all Dorset women; nor on all Dorset women who have illegitimate children; for a very few even of these are hanged. We feel that we are not concerned with a type, but with an individual case deliberately chosen by the author; and no amount of talk about the 'President of the Immortals' and his 'Sport' can persuade us to the contrary."[86]

In the absence of direct narrative commentary, then, how and to what extent do we get to "know" Esther? We got to "know" Alice Barton (whom Moore regarded as similar to Esther), we recall, because we were given access to her consciousness, largely through the use of free indirect speech. In that novel, there was a typically Victorian omniscient narrator whose opinions coincided with the educated Alice's to a considerable extent. There was no such omniscient narrator in the earlier *A Mummer's Wife*, and Kate's consciousness turned out to be either sentimental or obscured by her dreamy reveries. What, then, do we know of Esther's mental states?

In the first scene of the novel, we are given access to Esther's thoughts by a combination of narration and free indirect speech (italicized):

> She smiled, and her face became as bright as the month: it was the first day of June. *Still she would be glad when the first week was over. If she had only a dress to wear in the afternoons! The old yellow thing on her back would never do. But one of her cotton prints was pretty fresh; she must get a bit of red ribbon—that would make a difference.* She had heard that the housemaids in places like Woodview always changed their dresses twice a day, and on Sundays went out in silk mantles and hats in the newest fashion. *As for the lady's-maid, she of course had all her mistress's clothes, and walked with the butler. What would such people think of a little girl like her!* Her heart sank at the thought, and she sighed, anticipating much bitterness and disappointment. *Even when her first quarter's wages came due she would hardly be able to buy herself a dress: they would want the money at home. Her quarter's wages! A month's wages most like, for she'd never be able to keep the place. No doubt all those fields belonged to the Squire, and those great trees too; they must be fine folk, quite as fine as Lady Elwin—finer, for she lived in a house like those near the station.*
> (2-3, my italics)

Esther's concerns—her clothes, what her fellow employees will think of her, her wages, her new employers—are all highly practical, as befits a girl of her station. This remains true throughout the novel; and, given her struggle for existence, her practicality is hardly surprising. After William dies, the struggle is renewed, and Esther meditates in the following prosaic way:

> She did not know how they were to live, that was the worst of it. If they only had back the money they had sunk in the house she would not so much mind. That was what was so hard to bear; all that money lost, just as if they had thrown it into the river. Seven years of hard work—for she had worked hard—and nothing to show for it. If she had been doing the grand lady all the time it would have been no worse. Horses had won and horses had lost—a great deal of trouble and fuss and nothing to show for it. That was what stuck in her throat. Nothing to show for it. (290)

The phrases "doing the grand lady," "a great deal of trouble and fuss" and the repetition of "nothing to show for it" indicate that this is Esther's free indirect speech. With such worries the narrator (and the reader) has no trouble sympathizing; Esther's thoughts, however practical, are never on a purely animalistic level. She is definitely a higher order of character than the brutalized Gervaise, or than her own slum-child sister Jenny or her sleazy friend Sarah. Her maternal feelings for Jackie, for example, are simple, natural and entirely human:

> She could not sleep; she lay with her arms about her baby, distracted at the thought of parting from him. What had she done that her baby should be separated from her? What had the poor little darling done? He at least was innocent; why should he be deprived of his mother? At midnight she got up

> and lighted a candle, looked at him, took him in her arms, squeezed him to her bosom till he cried, and the thought came that it would be sweeter to kill him with her own hands than to be parted from him. (120)

The helpless rhetorical questions here are Esther's free indirect speech, and simply indicate her protective love for her child; similarly, when she is out of work and desperate,

> She drew her shawl about her baby and tried once more to persuade herself into accepting the shelter of the workhouse. It seemed strange even to her that a pale, glassy moon should float high up in the sky, and that she should suffer; and then she looked at the lights that fell like golden daggers from the Surrey shore into the river. *What had she done to deserve the workhouse? Above all, what had the poor, innocent child done to deserve it?* She felt that if she once entered the workhouse she would remain there. *She and her child paupers for ever.* "But what can I do?" she asked herself crazily, and sat down on one of the seats. (133, my italics)

In this passage, the sentences containing the "pale, glassy moon" and the "lights that fell like golden daggers" are obviously part of the narrator's observation of Esther, the three italicized sentences are Esther's free indirect speech, the sentence beginning "She felt that" is indirect speech (or thought) and the final sentence is Esther's thought expressed in direct speech. The effect of these two passages is typical. Esther's mental processes never progress beyond such straightforward pondering, even when she is considering weightier, more "philosophical" ideas, as I shall show presently.

It is this limitation to which Nicholas objects, particularly at the critical point in the novel when Esther must choose between William and Fred. Nicholas argues that the basis for her decision is unclear because Esther herself is only dimly aware of her reasons.[87] It is certainly true that Esther does not quite understand why she chooses William, but it is equally true that the reader does understand, and applauds her decision. At first, Esther regards her encounter with William as a piece of bad luck:

> Ah! if she hadn't happened to go out at that particular time she might never have met William. He did not live in the neighbourhood; if he did they would have met before. Perhaps he had just settled in the neighbourhood. That would be the worst of all. No, no, no; it was a mere accident; if the cask of beer had held out a day or two longer, or if it had run out a day or two sooner, she might never have met William! (170)

Her opening sigh and repeated "no, no, no" indicate to the reader her ambivalent feelings about the encounter, even though she herself is largely unaware of them. She then attempts to rationalize her preference for William over Fred:

> She had told Fred about the child. He had forgiven her. But now she remembered that men were very forgiving before marriage, but how did she know that he would not reproach her with her fault the first time they came to disagree about anything? . . . It was clear to her now that Jackie never would take kindly to Fred as a stepfather; that he would never forgive her if she divided him from his real father by marrying another man. (189, 195)

Finally, we see her give up trying to understand her own feelings:

> She was whelmed with a sense of sorrow, of purely mental misery, which she could not understand, and which she had not strength to grapple with. She was, however, conscious of the fact that life was proving too strong for her, that she could make nothing of it, and she thought that she did not care much what happened. . . . She sought to stimulate her liking for

> [Fred] with thoughts of the meeting-house; she thought even of the simple black dress she would wear, and that life seemed so natural to her that she did not understand why she hesitated. . . . If she were to marry William she would go to the "King's Head." She would stand behind the bar; she would serve the customers. She had never seen much life, and felt somehow that she would like to see a little life; there would not be much life in the cottage at Mortlake; nothing but the prayer-meeting. *She stopped thinking, surprised at her thoughts. She had never thought like that before; it seemed as if some other woman whom she hardly knew was thinking for her.* (200-01)

Surely it is characteristic of Esther the scullery-maid that her mind should dwell on such literal realities as "the simple black dress she would wear" in trying to make her decision, and surely it is also characteristic of her to suspend her "worldly" thoughts in surprise. Nicholas objects strongly to the "other woman" who seems to be "thinking for her" on the grounds that it is evasive. The reader, of course, is well aware of Esther's reasons for choosing William, even if she is not. We are told that

> She tried to think of Fred, but William's great square shoulders had come between her and this meagre little man. She sighed, and felt once again that her will was overborne by a force which she could not control or understand, (200)

and this is perfectly consistent with Esther's having been in love with William from the first. She never is in love with the overly-pious Fred, and her reasons for rejecting him are perfectly adequate:

> There was in her mind unconscious regret that he was not a little different. Little irrelevant thoughts came upon her. She would like him better if he wore coloured neckties and a short jacket; she wished half of him away—his dowdiness, his sandy-coloured hair, the vague eyes, the black neckties, the long loose frock-coat. (202)

Esther's puzzlement over the discrepancy between what she has been taught is right (her religion) and what she feels is right (her instincts) continues throughout the novel. (As Peter Ure puts it, Esther is "one of the first characters in fiction to make so clearly Huck's choice—to put friends first and 'virtue' second.")[88] After she is married to William, Fred comes to warn Esther that her husband might be prosecuted for taking bets. After he leaves,

> In her plain and ignorant way she thought on the romance of destiny. For if she had married Fred her life would have been quite different. She would have led the life that she wished to lead, but she had married William and—well, she must do the best she could. (257)

"In her plain and ignorant way" expresses with utter clarity the limitations of Esther's attempts to make judgments about life, even her own life. Still later, when she looks back over the years, she reflects that

> William had proved a kind husband, and in the seven years she had spent in the "King's Head" there had been some enjoyment of life. She couldn't say that she had been unhappy. She had always disapproved of the betting. They had tried to do without it. There was a great deal in life which one couldn't approve of. (290)

Such simple, unedified resignation, in fact, is one of the things that give Esther her dignity and one of the reasons why we like her. In this respect she no doubt illustrates another of the lessons Moore learned from Pater—"I had not thought of the simple and unaffected joy of the heart of natural things . . . nor . . . of the beauty of mildness in life. . . ."[89]—a lesson that he was to put into practice again and again in the simple souls who populate his later fiction.

Esther's goodness is also the result of Moore's emphasis on "instinct." "All my sympathies are with instincts and their development," he wrote. "Instinct alone may lead us aright."[90] In heeding her feelings instead of her religion in choosing what is "right," Esther is undoubtedly following her instincts; but, as Helmut Gerber is careful to point out, "It soon became clear that he [Moore] did not mean by instinct quite the same thing that some of the naturalists assuming the role of biologists meant by the term. It is the essence of a personality, the complex interraction [sic] of feelings GM has in mind . . . in his view instinct was the expression of the real self and, as he sometimes seems to think, the best self."[91] This "psychological" bent, learned at least partly from the example of the Russian writers, was also to occupy Moore in his later work. Richard Cave remarks that "The cyclic pattern with its psychological and moral implications concerning man's need to trust his instincts to achieve psychic health is a profoundly original creation. *Esther Waters* marks Moore's discovery of what was to be the principal philosophical theme of his later work. If there are some minor uncertainties of definition, it is because this is a first assay into territory previously uncharted in the landscape of the mind."[92]

Essentially, Esther's instincts—for survival, for the good of her son and husband—are quite different from the "animal" instincts of most of Zola's characters, who primarily want only rest, food, warmth and occasionally drink and sex. In a word, Esther displays a version of the "higher" instincts which are usually characteristic of English fictional main characters. Even when she has just narrowly escaped the poorhouse, for example, she feels her position as a wet-nurse to be a demeaning one:

> Henceforth it seemed to Esther that she was eating all day. The food was doubtless necessary after the great trial of the flesh she had been through, likewise pleasant after her long abstinences. She grew happy in the tide of new blood flowing in her veins, and might easily have abandoned herself in the seduction of these carnal influences. But her moral nature was of tough fibre, and made mute revolt. Such constant mealing did not seem natural, and the obtuse brain of this lowly servant-girl was perplexed. Her self-respect was wounded; she hated her position in this house. . . . (121-22)

In spite of her "obtuse brain," Esther is naturally "moral" enough for her "self-respect" to be wounded by such treatment; by the same token she "burn[s] and chok[es] with shame" when she overhears another employer refer to her as a "loose woman" (144). In this respect, Sarah is a good foil for Esther. She comes to the end which eventually overtakes both Kate Ede and Gervaise—prostitution—and is a much more "naturalistic" character, as I have noted. Lionel Stevenson also sees Esther's moral integrity as intrinsically English, noting that "the combination of realistic candour and humane sympathy results in a moving portrait of a humble and courageous woman in a tradition going back through George Eliot all the way to Wordsworth."[93]

But we do not like Esther only because she is a "good" woman. We also admire her because of the way in which she is presented to us. As I have pointed out, Moore's narrator in *Esther Waters* usually declines to comment on Esther directly and largely eschews the use of free indirect speech in presenting her thoughts. Instead, she is allowed to speak for herself, at some length, and the reader derives his most vivid impression of Esther (and much of the social morality of the novel) from these speeches.

It is apparent from the first that Esther is "plain-spoken." When William tells her he loves her for the first time, her reply is characteristic: "I wonder if that is true. What is there to love in me?" (58). Esther's bluntness, especially toward the middle-class people who exploit and humiliate her, sometimes borders on rudeness. When she is seeking a letter of referral to the maternity hospital, for example, one lady refuses but "asks her many questions," to which Esther replies, "I don't see what interest all that can be to you, as you ain't going to give me a letter" (99). When a footman at another house asks her how she happened to get into trouble, she snaps, "What business is that of yours? I don't ask your business" (99). And later, when she is employed as a wet-nurse and her employer remarks that she couldn't possibly nurse her child herself, Esther asks bluntly, "Why couldn't you, ma'am? You look fairly strong and healthy" (126). Still later, when one of her employers is curious about where Esther's money goes, she risks dismissal by saying, "What I do with my wages is my affair; I've plenty of use for my money" (140), and when another mistress confronts her with the rumour that she is an unmarried mother, Esther answers, "I've been unfortunate; I've a child, but that don't make no difference so long as I gives satisfaction in my work" (142). Such rebukes, we cannot help feeling, are richly deserved by such employers, and their overall effect is to make us admire Esther's courage.

Esther is a "good" woman, but she is obviously a far cry from the meek, retiring ideal of Victorian womanhood of which Tess, for instance, is an example. As Gail Cunningham remarks, in *Tess* "There is still a faint residue of the idea . . . that the fallen woman's claims to compassion must derive from exceptional personal qualities and not from objective justice. Tess's 'meekness,' 'long-suffering' and 'endurance' in her love for Clare and her declaration that 'the punishment you have measured out to me is deserved . . . and you are quite right and just to be angry with me' tug pitifully at the emotions. . . ."[94] As Cunningham rightly observes, Tess's attitude to (and expiation of) her "sin" is simply a more modern version of Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth's: "Ruth, in this period the standard fictional defence of the unmarried mother, depicts a woman of reassuring ethereal beauty. Ruth falls, but rises so steadily that her inevitable death scene is attended with an embarrassingly awesome holiness. . . . Ruth is not guilty of being unfortunate but of sinning: the novel's argument . . . is that such a sin can and should be forgiven."[95] Esther's "I've a child, but that don't make no difference so long as I gives satisfaction in my work" (142) obviously contains none of Tess's or Ruth's meek repentance. Neither does Esther possess the intelligence which allows other "exceptional" Victorian heroines (such as Dorothea Brooke or Rhoda Nunn) to be outspoken. Esther simply refuses to knuckle under to unfair conditions without protest, and her forthrightness on such occasions constitutes a streak of very modern feminism which runs through the whole novel.

In her dealings with the men in her life, Esther is similarly blunt, scorning deference to them even though they represent financial security. Her honesty in such circumstances is one of her most admirable characteristics. After she tells Fred about her child, he starts to ask her if she has been a "good woman" in the interval, but Esther interrupts him by saying, "I don't want no ifs. If I am not good enough for you, you can go elsewhere and get better; I've had enough of reproaches" (161). At this the reader (the modern reader, at any rate) applauds; in such instances Esther has the courage to say what downtrodden Victorian heroines presumably always felt like saying but never dared.

Even more striking examples of just reprisals are the angry speeches with which Esther regales William when he tries to win "his share" of Jackie's affection. All of the indignation of the hapless female toward the irresponsible male of the species is contained in her diatribe:

> "No, I won't listen to you. But you shall listen to me. When I brought you here last week you asked me in the train what I had been doing all these years. I didn't answer you, but I will now. I've been in the workhouse."
>
> "In the workhouse!"
>
> "Yes, do that surprise you?"
>
> Then jerking out her words, throwing them at him as if they were half-bricks, she told him the story of the last eight years—Queen Charlotte's hospital, Mrs. Rivers, Mrs. Spires, the night on the Embankment, and the workhouse.
>
> "And when I came out of the workhouse I travelled London in search of sixteen pounds a year wages, which was the least

> I could do with, and when I didn't find them I sat here and ate dry bread. . . . I haven't said nothing about the shame and sneers I had to put up with—you would understand nothing about that,—and there was more than one situation I was thrown out of when they found I had a child. For they didn't like loose women in their houses; I had them very words said about me. And while I was going through all that you was living in riches with a lady in foreign parts; and now when she could put up with you no longer, . . . you come to me and ask for your share of the child. Share of the child! What share is yours, I'd like to know?" (192-93)

Esther has every moral right, of course, to throw her words at William "as if they were half-bricks"; they are words that Ruth should have thrown at Bellingham, that Fanny Robin should have thrown at Sergeant Troy, that Hetty Sorrel should have thrown at Arthur Donnithorne. And again, when William tries to persuade Esther to marry him "for [Jackie's] sake," she rounds on him in well-founded anger:

> "For his sake! I like that; as if I hadn't done enough for him. Haven't I worked and slaved myself to death and gone about in rags? That's what that child has cost me. Tell me what he's cost you. Not a penny piece—a toy boat and a suit of velveteen knickerbockers,—and yet you come telling me—I'd like to know what's expected of me. Is a woman never to think of herself? Do I count for nothing? For the child's sake, indeed! Now, if it was anyone else but you. Just tell me where do I come in? That's what I want to know. I've played the game long enough. Where do I come in? That's what I want to know." (197)

All of her accusations are so palpably and distressingly true that the reader cannot help but cheer her on. The "moral" or "point" Esther advances in such instances is undeniably more forceful than any amount of commentary by an omniscient narrator.

Her accusations of the woman who employs her as a wet-nurse are similarly effective in illustrating a particular moral. When the woman tells Esther that she will never be able to bring up her "poor little bastard child," Esther says,

> "It is wicked of you to speak like that, ma'am, though it is I who am saying it. It is none of the child's fault if he hasn't got a father, nor is it right that he should be deserted for that . . . and it is not for you to tell me to do such a thing. If you had made sacrifice of yourself in the beginning and nursed your own child such thoughts would not have come to you. But when you hire a poor girl such as me to give the milk that belongs to another to your child, you think nothing of the poor deserted one. He is but a bastard, you say, and had better be dead and done with. I see it all now; I have been thinking it out. It is all so hidden up that the meaning is not clear at first, but what it comes to is this, that fine folks like you pays the money, and Mrs. Spires and her like gets rid of the poor little things. Change the milk a few times, a little neglect, and the poor servant girl is spared the trouble of bringing up her baby and can make a handsome child of the rich woman's little starveling." (126-27)

Esther is speaking here (with Moore's implicit concurrence) to Victorian society. As I have mentioned, Moore got the idea for the baby-farm episode from an article in the 1890 *Contemporary Review* called "Baby Farming" by Benjamin Waugh, a founder of England's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.[96] This is further corroborated by an incident related by Havelock Ellis: "One occasion I specially recall when . . . [Moore] stopped me to talk with deep emotion, in reference to a then recent case, of the fate of young women who are compelled, by the hostile attitude of society, to destroy their illegitimate babies. Such tender human sympathy was one of his most pronounced traits, though it may perhaps surprise those who regard him simply as an apostle of art for art's sake."[97] A number of things about Moore's use of this article are of interest. First of all, he toned down Waugh's descriptions (which would have made good material for "sordid" naturalistic description) considerably. Here is Moore's baby-farm:

> The wall opposite seemed to be the back of some stables, and in the area of No. 3 three little mites were playing. The baby was tied in a chair, and a short fat woman came out of the kitchen at Esther's call, her dirty apron sloping over her high stomach. . . . (118)

And here is Waugh's:

> [The] children had sat daily in chairs till their thighs were now horribly raw with the wood of the chair and their own filth. . . . They were now ill, and had lain for days unmoved on pillows, cold, wet, sodden with filth, and creeping with maggots, a piece of sacking over them.[98]

Just as Moore avoided painterly, "aesthetic" description in scenes like the Derby Day scene, so he avoids the lurid depiction of physical unpleasantness; part of the calm repose of *Esther Waters* resides in the avoidance of both these extremes.

On the other hand, Moore's account is much more daring than Waugh's in its criticism of a society which allows such practices to be carried on. As Sporn points out, Waugh "carefully avoids condemning the well-to-do persons whose use of wet-nurses made baby farming a practicable enterprise. . . ."[99] There is another way, too, in which Moore extends Waugh's criticism. Waugh is anxious to protect the rights of innocent children, but refers to unwed mothers as "wrongdoers" whose "personal miseries . . . for everybody's sake had better sleep."[100]

Moore's whole novel is in a way a protest against this narrow-minded view. As we have seen, Esther is anything but ashamed of her single parenthood. This was a revolutionary notion at the time, except for extremely radical heroines such as Grant Allen's Hermione, who becomes a single parent by choice and in the service of her higher principles (and in the end commits suicide).

Apart from these larger issues, Esther sometimes tersely voices the more personal moral issues of the novel as well. Even the moral that Brian Nicholas claims the novel fails to realize, the moral embodied in Esther's reason for choosing to marry William, is enunciated by Esther as clearly as she is able to understand it. When she tells Fred that she is going to go and live with William, he reprimands her ("A married man, Esther—you who I thought so religious"), to which Esther replies,

> "Ah, religion is easy enough at times, but there is other times when it don't seem to fit in with one's duty. I may be wrong, but it seems natural like—he's the father of my child." (205)

And again, when Fred comes to the King's Head and reminds her of the morally good life she could have had with him, she tells him,

> "No, I've not changed, Fred, but things has turned out different. One doesn't do the good that one would like to do in the world; one has to do the good that comes to one to do. I've my husband and my boy to look to. Them's my good. At least, that's how I sees things." (256)

Ure points out that the latter speech is in fact the moral "kernel" of the novel: "'Them's my good' is one of those crystallizing moments, like 'Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff'. . . . This affirmation of the personal conscience is echoed in the structure of the book, which might otherwise be mistaken for an example of the moral duality which Brian Nicholas thinks it is."[101]

Indeed, to the modern reader at least, what Esther says in her blunt fashion makes eminent good sense. We like her because she does her best against great odds, because she has the courage to speak her mind and because she is instinctively good rather than pious. Most influential in forming our opinion of her, however, is the method of her presentation: Moore lets her act and speak for herself. As I have shown, the narrator rarely intrudes on Esther's presentation, either by direct commentary or by the more subtle devices of free indirect speech or the revelation of Esther's thoughts. The narrator's remark about Esther going into the mission tent at the Derby, for instance, is an exception:

> Prayer was so inherent in her that she felt no sense of incongruity, and had she been questioned she would have answered that it did not matter where we are, or what we are doing, we can always have God in our hearts. (236)

Obviously, we like Esther because Moore likes her. It seems odd that the character of Alice Barton, a much more intelligent heroine and one who espoused many of Moore's own convictions, is so much colder and less likeable. As I mentioned in Chapter III, this is possibly because Alice is too "moral" to be convincing; she has no human weaknesses which correspond to Esther's quick temper or blunt nature, for example. She is also an intellectual and, as Moore himself remarks, "we sympathize more readily and more warmly with material than with intellectual natures."[102] Also, because the narrator supports Alice wholeheartedly, in the characteristic manner of Victorian omniscient narrators, she seems at times to be a mere mouthpiece for the narrator's own views. Esther appears more genuinely autonomous, precisely because the narrator does not partake in her mental processes. In addition, the moral issues which confront Esther—the conflicts between instinctive human feeling and conventional notions of right and wrong—are more basic and more complex than the social issues which confront Alice. Anyone with any moral sense should be able to see that the Dublin marriage-market is corrupt, but it is not by any means immediately apparent that Esther's best choice is to marry the worldly William instead of the religious Fred. And finally, the hardships which Esther must undergo are much greater than those undergone by the more refined Alice. The difference between the two worlds these two heroines inhabit is touched on when Esther reminds the upper-class Miss Rice that "you've to chance it in the end—leastways a woman has. Not on the likes of you, miss, but the likes of us." Miss Rice agrees, and

> Her thought went back for a moment to the novel she was writing. It seemed to her pale and conventional compared with this rough page torn out of life. (206)

In her way, then, Esther manages to be just as much a "character" in the English sense as Alice is, even though she is also a somewhat "naturalistic" representative of the class of uneducated working girls to which she belongs. Peter Ure thinks that Esther's personality is in fact what makes *Esther Waters* a better novel than either *A Mummer's Wife* or *A Drama in Muslin*: "Is it . . . much too rough to say that *Esther Waters* is a world classic primarily because its heroine seems to us so much nicer than Kate Ede or Alice Barton? Esther acts nobly, as we think, Kate ignobly, and Alice merely sensibly."[103]

The "moral" aspect of *Esther Waters* is not confined to the character of Esther, of course. The events of the plot and their outcome also contribute to the overall "message" of the novel. Briefly, the events are as follows: Esther, who has been raised as one of the Plymouth Brethren, arrives at Woodview (a country house where the main occupation is horseracing) as a scullery maid. She is very happy there but becomes pregnant by William Latch, the cook's son, who subsequently elopes with a daughter of the household. Esther is forced to return to her family in London, where her stepfather drinks and bullies his wife and children. After her baby is born, she devotes her whole life to his care, taking positions first as a wet-nurse and then as a maid. When Jackie is eight years old, Esther meets the religious Fred Parsons, who wants to marry her. She accepts, but then happens to encounter William, who has left his first wife and is anxious to woo Esther again. Esther chooses to live with William (whom she later marries) and runs the King's Head pub with him for seven years, after which time he loses his licence because of betting and contracts consumption. After he dies Esther must again work as a servant to support herself and her son, who also works. When Jackie loses his job, Esther appeals for help to her former mistress at Woodview, Mrs. Barfield, who is happy to have her back. And so Esther returns to Woodview, which has fallen into ruin because of gambling losses, and lives as a companion to her mistress.

As we can see, this sequence of events constitutes a complete reversal of the plot of *Tess*, and indeed of many other Victorian novels, and the ways in which it does this mark *Esther Waters* as an undeniably "modern" novel by comparison. As we have seen, Esther herself is something of a surprise as a novel-heroine: she is not beautiful, she has a somewhat sullen nature and (most surprisingly) she is unable to learn how to read. The distinguishing features of many lower-class heroines in Victorian fiction which allow them to attain the status of main characters—their beauty, cheerfulness or intelligence—are entirely lacking in Esther. She is a working girl, pure and simple, unlike Tess or Gissing's Thyrza, for example, who are certainly exceptions. In fact, Esther might be said to be the first working-class "New Woman." As Gail Cunningham points out, "Intelligent, individualistic and principled, the New Woman was also essentially middle-class. Working-class women, while no longer hauling coal in mines eleven hours a day, still led lives so totally remote from the . . . shining feminine ideal against which the New Woman was reacting that this kind of revolt could do nothing for them. . . . The problems of working-class women were entirely different from those of the middle classes, and received very little attention from writers on the New Woman."[104]

The narrator goes to some trouble to point out that Esther is incapable of learning to read, for example, thus preventing the reader from identifying with her on the basis of middle-class notions of intelligence. The kindly Mrs. Barfield even gives Esther a weekly reading lesson, and

> These half-hours were bright spots of happiness in the serving-girl's weeks of work—happiness that had been and would be again. But although possessing a clear intelligence, Esther did not make much progress, nor did her diligence seem to help her. Mrs. Barfield was puzzled by her pupil's slowness; she ascribed it to her own inaptitude to teach and the little time for lessons. Esther's powerlessness to put syllables together, to grasp the meaning of words, was very marked. Strange it was, no doubt, but all that concerned the printed page seemed to embarrass and elude her. (27)

The usual turn of events in the traditional Victorian novel or in the "New Woman" novel would have been that the heroine's thirst for knowledge would have opened up a whole new world for her at this point, enabling her to better withstand the exigencies of her poverty. Malcolm Brown points out that Moore "took pains to explain that Esther's 'goodness' grew directly out of her illiteracy. Conversely, her companions in the servants' quarters are shown to be degraded in proportion to their literacy; like Kate Ede and Emma Bovary, they prepare themselves for their downfall by the compulsive reading of romantic novels. Moore was thus able to repeat once again his cherished belief that the Education Acts were subverting civilization and that salvation was only possible through a 'renaissance of illiteracy.'"[105] As I remarked earlier, Moore was particularly anxious that Esther's "instincts" constitute the reason for her survival; his emphasis on her illiteracy ensures that this is so.

Another reversal of the usual Victorian order of things is exemplified in the portrayal of the betting way of life and the religious way of life, which I have already examined in some detail. The excitement of horseracing almost overshadows the harm it does; on one hand William points out what good fortune his betting has brought them—

> "Don't the thirty pounds you're asking for Sarah come out of betting?"
> "I suppose it do."
> "Most certainly it do" (270)—

but later, when he is dying, he tells Jackie, "I was once well off, but I lost everything. No good comes of money that one doesn't work for" (313).

The religious way of life, espoused intermittently by Esther and constantly by Fred, is also portrayed impartially. Esther's religious tendencies are undoubtedly a sign of her innate moral goodness but, as we have seen, they do not in themselves constitute that goodness, and must sometimes take second place to what Esther feels to be instinctively right. Fred embodies an even more radical reversal from the Victorian model of a religious man. He is undoubtedly very good—

Esther tells him "I never thought to find a man so good" (162)—but, like the equally religious Mrs. Ede in *A Mummer's Wife*, he is not altogether likeable. He is physically unattractive (he is "a meagre little man about thirty-five" with a "high and prominent forehead," a "small pointed face," a "scanty growth of blonde beard," a "receding chin" and "red sealing-wax lips" [157]) and a trifle tedious in his piety: when he tells Esther that he has never "gone wrong," she "did not like him any better for his purity, and was irritated by the clear tones of his icy voice" (161).

In spite of these defects, however, we tend to see him initially as Esther's true match, a spiritually good character whose physical imperfections are of no importance, of the same general homely and gentle "type" as George Eliot's Seth Bede, for example.[106] We are further confirmed in this analysis by the kindness which Fred's family shows Esther and by the warmth and goodness which Esther can imagine in her future life with Fred:

> When they entered the house they saw the old farmer [Fred's father], who had slipped in before them, sitting by his wife holding her hand, patting it in a curious old-time way, and the attitude of the old couple was so pregnant with significance that it fixed itself on Esther's mind. It seemed to her that she had never seen anything so beautiful. So they had lived for forty years, faithful to each other, and she wondered if Fred forty years hence would be sitting by her side holding her hand. (166)

Esther's decision to go and live with William (who is still legally married) therefore comes as something of a surprise to the reader, even though William is clearly the more attractive of the two men. The reader accustomed to the Victorian division of characters into good and bad (as in the glaring contrast between Angel Clare and Alex D'Urberville) finds the difficulty of Esther's decision, and the decision itself, puzzling. Still more puzzling to such a reader is the fact that the decision turns out to be the right one—Esther is happy with William, and realizes "that she had got a good husband long before they slipped round to the nearest registry office and came back man and wife" (213). This, as Malcolm Brown points out, constitutes one of the novel's major "reversals" of conventional expectations:

> The ménage turns out to be not at all unsatisfactory, and it thus violated at once the Anglo-Saxon tradition in fiction and the moral expectations of evangelical readers. . . . Such a treatment meant the end of standard plot of the Victorian novel, which found its new form, not in the rebellions of Ernest Pontifex or Bathsheba Everdene or Eustacia Vye, but in Esther Water's lucid choice to follow her first lover, to do what she must do.[107]

Douglas Hughes sees this sort of reversal as the result of Moore's French influences: "Not only was Moore the first British novelist to embrace the French conception of characterization, he likewise departed from the Victorian custom of manipulating characters for social or moral ends."[108]

Esther's success in raising her illegitimate child is another unfamiliar twist to the usual Victorian tale of misery. An extension of W. H. Mallock's "rule" that the men and women in Victorian novels should all "stop short of one another at a certain point" was that "any grave transgression of the conventional moral code shall entail on its transgressors some appropriate punishment, or, at all events, that it shall not end in their happiness."[109] Hetty Sorrel's sad end (as well as Tess's, even though the whole novel is a protest against it) is an obvious manifestation of adherence to this rule. Graham Hough remarks that "The radical novelty of Moore's plot is that it avoids this myth of retribution."[110] Moore's comment on the turn of events in *Adam Bede* was that "A woman's moulding of the subject, a true moulding, would be Hetty living to save her child,"[111] and this is just what Esther does, with reward instead of punishment. Richard Cave points out that the woman's struggle for her illegitimate child is also represented as laudable in Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth*; but Ruth, even though the narrator deplores the brutality of a society that makes it necessary, spends her whole lifetime in repentance for her sin, thus conforming to the Victorian code.

Esther Waters, then, in its outright transgression of the accepted Victorian system of good and evil, punishments and rewards, can be said to be a step closer in attitude than even Hardy's later novels to the "modern" novel. If we examine Esther's "rewards" more closely, however, we can discern a curious tendency for them to resemble the conventional rewards of the conventional Victorian heroine. Her child, for instance, brings her great satisfaction, both when he is small ("a great longing was in her heart to clasp him in her arms again, to feel his soft cheek against hers, to take his chubby legs and warm, fat feet in her hands") and when he is a young man:

> Jack was a great tall fellow of fifteen, and had happily lost none of his affection for his mother, and great sweetness rose up within her. She looked at his long, straight, yellow-stockinged legs; she settled the collar of his cloak, and slipped her fingers into his leathern belt as they walked side by side. He was bare-headed, according to the fashion of his school, and she kissed the wild, dark curls with which his head was run over; they were much brighter in colour when he was a little boy—those days when she slaved seventeen hours a day for his dear life! But he paid her back tenfold for the hardship she had undergone. (302-03)

Such maternal pride and affection are surely recognizable as Victorian virtues which are meant to be their own rewards. The quiet domesticity which Esther enjoys with William is similarly conventional; one evening when William announces his intention of dining out, for instance, the following exchange takes place:

> Seeing how disappointed she was, he hesitated, and asked what there was for dinner. "A sole and a nice piece of steak; I'm sure you'll like it. I've a lot to talk to you about. Do stop, Bill, to please me." She was very winning in her quiet, grave way, so he took her in his arms, kissed her, and said he would stop, that no one could cook a sole as she could, that it gave him an appetite to think of it. (212)

Such homely joys embody the Victorian ideals of hearth and home, marriage and children, which virtually all Victorian heroines long for. Esther's manner of attaining them may be slightly unconventional, but attain them she does. As in *A Drama in Muslin*, marriage in *Esther Waters* is presented as a desirable state. Lloyd Fernando points out that "Once Esther marries William, . . . she enhances appreciably the degree of autonomous action open to her. That is, she enters the man's world and obtains through it a measure of protection from gross economic and social pressures."[112] As I have already mentioned, Moore was "conservative" in this belief, which was to reappear in much of his later work. Similarly, at the end of the novel, the peace Esther finds with her former mistress bears no small resemblance to that which is found by any number of "good" Victorian heroines:

> And, dressed in long cloaks, the women went for walks together; sometimes they went up the hill, sometimes into Southwick to make some little purchases. On Sundays they walked to Beeding to attend meeting. And they came home along the winter roads, the peace and happiness of prayer upon their faces, holding their skirts out of the mud, unashamed of their common boots. (324)

Finally, the grown-up Jackie comes to visit his mother, and Esther's happiness is complete:

> A tall soldier came through the gate. He wore a long red cloak, and a small cap jauntily set on the side of his close-clipped head. Esther uttered a little exclamation, and ran to meet him. He took his mother in his arms, kissed her, and they walked towards Mrs. Barfield together. All was forgotten in the happiness of the moment—the long fight for his life, and the possibility that any moment might declare him to be mere food for power and shot. She was only conscious that she had accomplished her woman's work—she had brought him up to man's estate; and that was her sufficient reward. (331)

This is hardly sentimental, compared to the endings of *Adam Bede* or even of *A Drama in Muslin* with their scenes of domestic bliss, but its mood (apart from the reminder that "any moment might declare him to be mere food for powder and shot") can certainly be classified as "Victorian."

The overall moral implications of the novel, though, contain some moderately severe criticisms of Victorian notions of "right" and "wrong." What Moore regarded as the message of the novel—the triumph of the personal conscience over the communal—is embodied in Esther's reponse to her situation. As I have already remarked, this constitutes a modern feminist aspect of the novel. In addition, the novel is a criticism of a society which makes Esther's struggle needlessly difficult. In this respect, too, *Esther Waters* tends to be an English novel as opposed to a naturalistic novel; it implies that the social order could be improved, but denies that it is the vast sickness that Zola perceives it to be. In fact, as Noël points out, happiness and misfortune are fairly evenly balanced in *Esther Waters*,[113] another facet of the novel that tends to be "realistic" in the modern sense.

Carol Ohmann is simply incorrect when she suggests that there is no "implied ideal" in *Esther Waters*. She comes to this conclusion because of the mundane, "physical" nature of Esther and her world:

> *Esther Waters* offers neither its characters nor its readers any paradisal vision, however impossible it may be to achieve, that is worth wishing for . . . imagine the millennium in terms of Moore's world in *Esther Waters*. Teeth would be straightened and diets made more nourishing. The cinders and tin cans would be cleared from gardens whose composition would be altered for the better by the addition of proper quantities of lime and peat moss. Domestic architecture would improve and principles of landscape architecture would be applied.[114]

In addition, Ohmann sees the conclusion of *Esther Waters* as "a successful flight from contemporary life."[115] But these claims are wide of the mark. Surely the ideal implied in the novel, while hardly

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In addition, Ohmann sees the conclusion of *Esther Waters* as "a successful flight from contemporary life."[115] But these claims are wide of the mark. Surely the ideal implied in the novel, while hardly "paradisal" (and here Ohmann betrays her pro-Victorian proclivities) would be something like the following: society's attitude toward servant-girls like Esther (exemplified in the practice of baby-farming) causes unnecessary hardship and should be more humane; and the quality of simple human goodness should be given a high value whether or not it is displayed in a religious or intellectual form.

As I have pointed out, the narrator has deliberately kept Esther's inner workings to a minimum, choosing instead to have the events of the novel illustrate this ideal for themselves. Subsidiary points, concrete examples of the "implied ideal," are also illustrated in dramatic form, usually dialogue. When Esther asks Mrs. Barfield for a "character," for example, she replies,

> "It seems to me now that it would be wrong to refuse. If I did you might never get a place, and then it would be impossible to say what might happen. I am not certain that I am doing right, but I know what it means to refuse to give a servant a character, and I cannot take upon myself the responsibility." (77)

The brief dialogue Esther overhears in the employment office likewise makes its own point:

> "I have lived with her more than thirty years; I brought up all the children. I entered her service as nurse, and when the children grew up I was given the management of everything. For the last fifteen years my mistress was a confirmed invalid. She entrusted everything to me. . . . But when she died they had to part with me; they said they were very sorry, and wouldn't have thought of doing so, only they were afraid I was getting too old for the work. . . ."
>
> At that moment the secretary, an alert young woman with a decisive voice, came through the folding doors.

> "I will not have all this talking," she said. Her quick eyes fell on the little old woman, and she came forward a few steps. "What, you here again, Miss Holmes? I've told you that when I hear of anything that will suit you I'll write." (148)

In this way the narrator "shows" rather than "tells" both the minor points and the larger moral issues of the novel. In accordance with the naturalist principle of objectivity, Moore keeps both authorial commentary and deeper probing into the characters' consciousness to a minimum.

The narrator in *Esther Waters* is very different from the impassive, "clinical" observer we sensed in *A Mummer's Wife*, however. He does not "disappear" in the same a-moral, scientific way; instead, as Graham Hough aptly observes, he "stands aside," displaying a kind of objective comprehension which "becomes at its highest pitch a kind of charity."[116] Humbert Wolfe, an early critic of Moore, also sensed this quality, saying that "George Moore has the widest human sympathy of any English novelist,"[117] and R. Ellis Roberts, another early critic of the novel, notes that "*Esther Waters* is better than anything of Zola's, because while Moore writes according to the naturalistic formula he does not *feel* according to it."[118] Other critics of the time, used to the romanticized, melodramatic vision of life and character portrayed in more conventional Victorian novels, complained that the "soul . . . is missing."[119] Katharine Mansfield described it as having "not . . . the faintest stirring of the breath of life,"[120] and Virginia Woolf claimed that "Mr. Moore has not the strength to project Esther from himself. . . . There it lies, this novel without a heroine. . . ."[121]

The fact remains, however, that Esther does live in our imaginations; not larger than life as Tess does, perhaps, but as Moore intended her to: "The girl I am trying to depict," he wrote in 1892, "represents the simple sturdy steadfastness of the Saxon race."[122]

Moore's ability to create such a work at this time was due to a variety of influences. He had abandoned, at least temporarily, the aesthetic, decadent concerns of Huysmans in favour of a simpler concept of natural life derived largely from Pater and to some extent from Turgenev and Dostoevsky. Hone comments that Moore, "accepting Pater's doctrine that sensation is the touchstone of value, but caring nothing for Pater's philosophic speculations,... nevertheless cast his net more widely and communicated a more direct enjoyment of life than the master whom he always revered."[123] The "decadent" aspect of Marius, in other words—what Arthur Symons describes as "that morbid subtlety of analysis, that morbid curiosity of form"[124]—formed no part of Moore's inspiration for *Esther Waters*. "The beauty of the mildness in life" that Moore learned from Pater makes its first appearance in *Esther Waters*, along with a kind of seriousness (what Walter Allen senses as a "grave sympathy").[125] There is no trace of humour in *Esther Waters*; in *Avowals* Moore says that "the difference between *Marius* and every other prose narrative in the English language was its seriousness. . . . No writer except yourself, my dear Pater, has written a serious story in which jokes good and bad do not occur, in which the quality known as humour is omitted. . . . You were the first to discover in English literature that life is neither jocular nor melodramatic. . . ."[126] His reading of the Russian writers also impelled Moore away from Zola's materialism and toward the serious characterization of humble but virtuous subjects; he admired Turgenev's adherence to the "thought school" of fiction, and in his Preface to Lena Milman's translation of *Poor Folk* in 1894, the same year that *Esther* was published, he asserted that "the anecdote that does not represent a moral idea, however curious, however exciting, can never rise to the height of great literature."[127]

Apart from these new literary interests, his friendship with Mrs. Craigie also pointed him in a "moral" direction; Lionel Stevenson remarks that "Her Bostonian refinement put the final quietus upon the wild Irish element in Moore's naturalism."[128] In any event, *Esther Waters* is a fine example of "the great moral integrity" which Graham Hough finds in Moore's work.[129] It is undeniably true that the novel's reputation has survived on the basis of its moral beauty and value, and Hough appropriately concludes his 1964 introduction to *Esther Waters* by remarking that

> Moore never wrote anything else like it. Yet in his later work, far removed from the realistic norm, the same sense of quietly felt, uninflated sympathy with the central human emotions can be experienced. . . . It is the concealed thread that really makes a unity out of the pantomime variations of George Moore's career.[130]

4. Formal Considerations

> [*Esther Waters*] shows a really exquisite art in the arrangement of the material, in the choice of incident, and in the illustrative conversations; and it has a fixed unity of purpose which makes of it a most perfect whole. . . .[131]
>
> We are left feeling that there is not a page, paragraph, sentence, word, that is not right, the only possible page, paragraph, sentence, word. . . . The technique is so even, it is as though a violinist were to play the whole concerto in one stroke of the bow.[132]

These two excerpts from unfavourable reviews of *Esther Waters* in the *Athenaeum*, the first in 1895, the second (by Katharine Mansfield) in 1920, indicate that even Moore's detractors had to acknowledge the formal beauty with which the novel is crafted. Mansfield's remark in particular indicates how successfully Moore had assimilated Flaubert's ideal of "le mot juste" by this time.

The simplicity which informs the tone, theme and characterization of the novel is echoed in its prose style. Its plainness and muted quality, even in its descriptive passages, can best be illustrated by a further comparison with *Tess*. In both novels the heroine's sexual longings (Tess's for Angel, Esther's for William) are promoted at least partly by her response to nature. The well-known passage in *Tess* begins as follows:

> Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Froom Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization, it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate. The ready bosoms existing there were impregnated by their surroundings.[133]

Here is the corresponding passage in *Esther Waters*:

> There was a stillness and a sweetness abroad which penetrated and absorbed her. She moved towards the paddock gate; the pony and the donkey came towards her, and she rubbed their muzzles in turn. It was a pleasure to touch anything, especially anything alive. She even noticed that the elm trees were strangely tall and still against the calm sky, and the rich odour of some carnations which came through the bushes from the pleasure-ground excited her; the scent of earth and leaves tingled in her, and the cawing of the rooks coming home took her soul away skyward in an exquisite longing; she was, at the same time, full of romantic love for the earth, and of a desire to mix herself with the innermost essence of things. (35)

Hardy's "oozing fatness," "warm ferments" and "hiss of fertilization" have no parallel in Moore's more direct and less sensual description with its "stillness and sweetness," "scent of earth and leaves" and homely farm animals. Even Esther's "exquisite longing," "romantic love for the earth" and "desire to mix herself with the innermost essence of things" are comparatively straightforward. The fanciful, lush descriptions in *A Drama in Muslin* are likewise almost entirely absent from *Esther Waters*. Even in descriptions which lend themselves to verbal luxury, such as the "Derby Day" scene I have already examined, Moore exhibits great restraint. A "painterly" touch sometimes creeps into the writing, as in the following description of London when Esther is looking for work, but such passages are the exception:

> A true London of the water's edge—a London of theatres, music-halls, wine-shops, public-houses—the walls painted various colours, nailed over with huge gold lettering; the pale air woven with delicate wire, a gossamer web underneath which the crowd moved like lazy flies, one half watching the

> perforated spire of St. Mary's, and all the City spires behind it now growing cold in the east, the other half seeing the spire of St. Martin's above the chimney-pots aloft in a sky of cream pink. (151)

There is only one instance of outright indulgence in Huysmanesque "fine writing" in the whole novel, in fact. This occurs in Chapter 9 in the description of the atmosphere at Woodview after a winning streak:

> So the flood of gold continued to roll into the little town, decrepit and colourless by its high shingle beach and long reaches of muddy river. The dear gold jingled merrily in the pockets, quickening the steps, lightening the heart, curling lips with smiles, opening lips with laughter. The dear gold came falling softly, sweetly as rain, soothing the hard lives of working folk. Lives pressed with toil lifted up and began to dream again. The dear gold was like an opiate; it wiped away memories of hardship and sorrow, it showed life in a lighter and merrier guise, and the folk laughed at their fears for the morrow and wondered how they could have thought life so hard and relentless. The dear gold was pleasing as a bird on the branch, as a flower on the stem; the tune it sang was sweet, the colour it flaunted was bright. (55)

Such a "poetic" passage, with its unusual cadences (signalled by the repetition of "the dear gold") is glaringly out of place in the matter-of-fact prose of the rest of the novel,[134] unlike the very similar "symphony in white and silver" passage in *A Drama in Muslin*, for example. Even the "mystical" episode in which Ketley is beckoned into the jug-and-bottle bar by an unseen "someone" is better integrated into the novel's structure, partly because it is rendered mainly in the character's down-to-earth dialogue ("If you don't see it, you don't see it; but it's plain enough to me. . . . I wouldn't go in there for a sovereign " [287]). For the most part, the novel is written in a style as plain and functional as Esther herself, to which Lionel Stevenson attributes "the effect of naive directness that gave the novel its realistic impact in the nineties."[135] Carol Ohmann mistakenly believes that this plain prose style indicates the "colouring" of the narrative passages by the characters' idiom: "The drabness of Esther's sensibility has, as it were, overspread its boundaries; Esther's language is pressed into service in fictional chores not even logically proper to it. . . ."[136] We have only to compare *Esther Waters* to *L'Assommoir* in this respect to see that this is not the case;[137] also, the examples Ohmann gives are not convincing ("led into intemperance," "wild companions," "fit state," "fumes overpowered," "called upon God" and "relieve of suffering" can hardly be labelled "clichés" with any real degree of confidence).

I have already examined Moore's limited use of free indirect speech in rendering Esther's consciousness. As I have pointed out, Esther's character is revealed mainly in direct speech, or dialogue. Not surprisingly, Moore exhibits the same skill in rendering dialogue in *Esther Waters* as he did in *A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin.* The indicators "he said" or "she said" are often omitted, giving an impression of ease and naturalness. Such conversations frequently make their own "point," as it were, without the appearance of narrative intervention. The following exchange between Esther and Jackie is a good example:

> "But why can't I wear that velvet suit, and why can't father come back? Why don't you like father? You shouldn't

> be cross with father because he gave me the boat. He didn't mean no harm."
> "I think you like your father. You like him better than me."
> "Not better than you, mummie."
> "You wouldn't like to have any other father except your own real father?"
> "How could I have a father that wasn't my own real father?" (194-95)

Even when there is a shift straight from narration to speech, the transition is often made without indicators, as in the following passage describing Esther's relationship with Miss Rice:

> They were not unlike—quiet, instinctive Englishwomen, strong, warm natures, under an appearance of formality and reserve.
> The instincts of the watch-dog soon began to develop in Esther, and she extended her supervision over all the household expenses, likewise over her mistress's health.
> "Now, miss, I must 'ave you take your soup while it is 'ot. You'd better put away your writing; you've been at it all the morning. You'll make yourself ill, and then I shall have the nursing of you." (156-57)

Another device with which Moore displayed great adeptness in *A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin* (especially the former) was what I described earlier as "free indirect conversation." Such capsule conversations, in which the voices of both the characters and the summarizing narrator are present, are an extremely effective and economical method of reporting dialogue. There are several such passages in *Esther Waters*, of which the following (taking place just after Esther re-encounters William) is a good example:

> Now she could not keep out of his way. He spent the whole day in the street waiting for her. If she went out on an errand he followed her there and back. If she'd only listen. She was prettier than ever. He had never cared

> for any one else. He would marry her when he got his divorce, and then the child would be theirs. She did not answer him, but her blood boiled at the word "theirs." How could Jackie become their child? Was it not she who had worked for him, brought him up? and she thought as little of his paternity as if he had fallen from heaven into her arms. (170)

The sentences beginning with "If only she'd listen" are obviously William's free indirect conversation, while the two sentences beginning "How could Jackie" and "Was it not she" are obviously Esther's. The transition between them—the single narrative sentence beginning "She did not answer him"—is beautifully smooth and unobtrusive, and the last line of the passage, we may note, achieves the switch from Esther's free indirect conversation back to narration within a single sentence.

Another good example of a smooth and effortless transition, this time from narration to free indirect conversation to direct speech, is Old John's description of his poverty:

> Old John told how unlucky he had been in business. He had been dismissed from his employment in the restaurant, not from any fault of his own, he had done his work well. "But they don't like old waiters; there's always a lot of young Germans about, and customers said I smelt bad. I suppose it was my clothes and want of convenience at home for keeping one's self tidy." (282)

Here Old John's "voice" is superimposed on the narrator's, beginning with "not from any fault of his own," or possibly even with "He had been dismissed. . . ." Again, the effect is one of compression with no loss of vividness. A variation on this device is a combination of free indirect conversation and direct speech representing thought, as in the following description of Esther's initial failure to obtain a position as a wet-nurse:

> And at the hospital only disappointment. Why hadn't she called yesterday? Yesterday two ladies of title had come and taken two girls away. Such a chance might not occur for some time. "For some time," thought Esther; "very soon I shall have to apply for admission at the workhouse." (116)

Esther's thought "For some time" is obviously in reply to a remark that is not actually stated but only reported by the narrator. The result is that our attention is focused on Esther and her thought much more closely than on the conversation, which seems (as it also must seem to Esther) slightly vague and distant. As I pointed out in Chapter I, such a smooth blending of narrative elements was a skill which Moore was later to develop into a completely new style of narrative, his famous "melodic line."

There is one instance in the novel in which Moore attempts to incorporate the characters' Cockney dialect into a passage of free indirect conversation. At the servants' ball,

> The lean woman in the muslin dress and the amber beads accused young Mr. Preston of something which he denied, and she heard William tell someone that he was mistaken, and that he and his pals didn't want no rowing at this 'ere ball, and what was more they didn't mean to have none. (60)

If this is meant to be humourous, it fails; if it is not, it creates a minor jarring note in the otherwise even tone of the description. There are no other attempts to introduce dialect into what is really narration, however, and generally Moore's use of free indirect conversation is extremely effective.[138]

Another aspect of Moore's prose in *Esther Waters* which is also an intimation of his later style is his use of anecdote. He had already begun to use this device in *A Mummer's Wife*, but as I pointed out in Chapter II, the anecdotes in that novel are rather too lengthy to obtain the effect of the momentary, vivid flashes which they do in the fully-developed "melodic line." In *Esther Waters* some of the anecdotes are also too long to be effective, and have the effect of unnecessary digressions from the main story line. William's long and tedious description of his first wife's unfaithfulness, and Journeyman's laborious calculations about betting, for instance, are simply instances of what Peter Ure terms "ballast." (Ure also finds "ballast" in the Derby Day scene, however,[139] which I think is an excellent example of many effective anecdotes expertly blended together.)

On the other hand, there are some anecdotes in *Esther Waters* which do achieve the effect of the "momentary glimpse" that Moore was later to perfect. One is very similar to the "love story" anecdote in *A Mummer's Wife*; when Esther and the doctor walk down the passage in the sanitarium,

> They passed down another passage, meeting a sister on their way; pretty and discreet she was in her black dress and veil, and she raised her eyes, glancing affectionately at the young doctor. No doubt they loved each other. The eternal love-story among so much death! (294-95)

Other brief and concrete flashes are Esther's recollection of her family's near-starvation—

> Once they passed nearly thirty hours without food. She called them round her, and knelt down amid them: they prayed that God might help them; and their prayers were answered, for at half-past twelve a Scripture lady came in with flowers in her hands. She asked Mrs. Saunders how her appetite was. Mrs. Saunders answered that it was more than she could afford, for there was nothing to eat in the house. Then the Scripture lady gave them eighteen pence, and they all knelt down and thanked God together (21)—

and the prank Esther plays on the "Wool-gatherer" at Woodview:

> Then there was the day when the Wool-gatherer told her he was in love, and what fun they had had, and how well she had led him into belief that she was jealous! She had taken a rope as if she were going to hang herself, and having fastened it to a branch, she had knelt down as if she were saying her prayers. The poor Wool-gatherer could stand it no longer; he had rushed to her side, swearing that if she would promise not to hang herself he would never look at another girl again. The other boys, who had been crouching in the drove-way, rose up. How they did chaff the Wool-gatherer! He had burst into tears and Esther had felt sorry for him, and almost inclined to marry him out of pity for his forlorn condition. (29-30)

Such tiny episodes, as I have remarked, are nothing like as numerous and polished as they are in the continual weaving of anecdote in *The Brook Kerith*, for example, but they are smoothly integrated into the prose of the novel and help to give it a greater sense of richness and "flow."

The overall movement of the novel, too, is highly controlled and smooth, unlike what Moore described as Hardy's "machine-made plots" in which abrupt changes in the characters' fortunes parallel abrupt changes in their locations (Tess goes from Marlott to Trantridge to Talbothays Dairy to Flintcomb-Ash to Sandbourne and finally to Stonehenge; Jude goes from Marygreen to Christminster to Melchester to Shaston to Aldbrickham and back to Christminster). Esther, too, moves from London to Woodview to London and back to Woodview, but these changes (like the recurrence of the betting milieu) appear to constitute part of the "rhythm" of the novel rather than sudden shifts. As Malcolm Brown remarks, "Moore's special and superior skill lay in his ability to tighten the consecutiveness of his narrative. . . ."[140] The passage of time, for example, is handled deftly in such asides as "in the last year Jackie had taken much and given nothing" (141), "Esther had been in the 'King's Head' now nearly a year" (213) and "It seemed like yesterday, and yet seventeen years and more had gone by" (322). Also, as Lloyd Fernando points out, "Moore's controlling emphasis does not violate the sequence of his narrative in real time. Each phase—seduction, pregnancy, birth, and economic struggle—is given attention proportionate to its duration in time. . . . Conventional ideas of a woman's guilt stand in abeyance when confronted by the real movement of life."[141] And, as in *A Mummer's Wife*, the easy transitions from the general to the particular help to compress the fictional time which elapses with no loss of vividness. Take, for example, the following description of Esther at home with her family:

> When Esther was dressed, she and Mrs. Saunders knelt down and said a prayer together. . . .
>
> In the afternoon she sat with her sisters, helping them with their dogs. . . . About five, . . . she and her mother went for a short walk. Very often they strolled through Victoria Station, amused by the bustle of the traffic, or maybe they wandered down the Buckingham Palace Road, attracted

> by the shops. . . .
> One day some flannel and shirts in a window caught Mrs. Saunder's eye. . . . (93-94)

This sequence begins with the particular ("When Esther was dressed," "In the afternoon she sat," et cetera), changes to the general with "Very often" and changes back to a particular occasion with "One day."

Such skill in dealing with the passage of time and with the pace of events in *Esther Waters* is certainly one of the novel's strengths. Hardy's "announcements" about the passage of time in *Tess*, for example, seem clumsy by comparison:

> From the foregoing events of the winter-time let us press on to an October day, more than eight months subsequent to the parting of Clare and Tess.[142]

Another instance of Hardy's "machine-made plots" of which Moore so thoroughly disapproved was presumably the highly fortuitous occurrence of Tess's note to Angel slipping under the rug. Moore, of course, eschews such overt "manipulation" entirely, regarding "inevitableness" and "rhythm" as "two words for one and the same thing."[143] As Malcolm Brown points out, the only coincidence in *Esther Waters* is the entirely unremarkable one of Esther encountering William again.[144]

Indeed, this contrast in the construction of their novels points to the quality most frequently assumed to characterize the difference between the kind of novelist Hardy is and the kind of novelist Moore is: Hardy has been called a genius but no craftsman,[145] while Moore has been called a craftsman who lacks genius.[146] It is unlikely, however, that a mere "craftsman" could have created a novel of such placid beauty as *Esther Waters*. Granville Hicks thinks that *Esther Waters* "seems miraculous" and says that "for all its beautiful lucidity, the book is never cold";[147] Enid Starkie calls it "good by any standards, however severe,"[148] and Douglas Hughes remarks that "Although the subject matter could readily have lent itself to sensational treatment, Moore never lost control of his characters or theme, never indulged in exaggerated pathos. The result was a vivid, wholly believable novel dramatizing not only the strength of the maternal instinct but also the resiliency of the human spirit."[149]

Finally, the ending of the novel, an almost exact repetition of the opening scene, constitutes one of Moore's major triumphs. It represents one of his early attempts to put into practice the principle of anti-climax which he so admired in Dostoevsky. Gerber points out that

> In describing the conclusion of *Poor Folk*, GM is in reality describing the conclusion of *Esther* and stating his theory of "suspended cadences"; "The mere act of concluding often serves to break the spell; the least violence, the faintest exaggeration is enough; we must drop into a minor key if we would increase the effect, only by a skilful use of anti-climax may we attain those perfect climaxes—sensations of inextinguishable grief, the calm resignation, the mute yearning for what life has not for the giving. In such pauses all great stories end."[150]

It was not until much later, of course, that Moore enunciated his theory of suspended cadences,[151] but the ending of *Esther Waters* is certainly a fine example of a "minor key." Critics are even in disagreement about whether it is a sad or a happy ending; W. C. Frierson complains that *Esther Waters* has "a heroine and a happy ending, which make it not naturalism at all,"[152] while Peter Ure thinks that "Probably the determination of readers and critics that fictive personages whom they admire should end happily has led them to overlook the many clues that give a very gloomy and foreboding character the last pages of the book."[153] Again, this ambivalence is simply further evidence of the successful "realism" of the novel, which reflects life's tendency to yield modest rewards and successes tempered by some degree of pain; and it also seems to me to be a fine early example of one of Alan Friedman's criteria for what constitutes a "modern" novel: "When, in the created experience we call the novel, 'The End' consistently turns out to be another opening in experience, endlessness has become an end. The new form for the novel exposes not only heroes and antiheroes but readers, too, to an essentially unlimited experience. And when it does that most uncompromisingly, it gives us our special sense that in its vision of life something is intangibly but forcefully modern."[154]

E. K. Brown singles out the ending of *Esther Waters* as an example of "verbal repetition complicated, enriched, by variation."[155] As Jean C. Noël points out, however, the rhythmical effect of the repetition of the opening scene may be exaggerated ("il faut juger la répetition finale dans le jeu des échos deformants qui brodent leurs variations émotives autour du thème central").[156] The real rhythm of the novel, as I have suggested, lies in the effortless transitions, the handling of fictional time, the repetition of certain jargon, places and people and the overall structure. Peter Ure agrees: "Moore also seems from the first to have been accomplished at *pace*, at the achievement of a large and satisfying movement, or rhythm, through his books. They conform at least to his own criteria, formulated about this time, for the 'avoidance of any disruptive sense of finality at the end of each episode or chapter' and for 'rhythmical progression of events, rhythm and inevitableness (two words for one and the same thing).'"[157]

Structurally, then, *Esther Waters* is a unified, seamless, rhythmical whole. The precepts of formal beauty that Moore had learned from Flaubert ("le mot juste"), Pater (restraint and the absence of humour), Turgenev (subtlety) and Dostoevsky (anti-climaxes) enabled him to adapt the naturalist and Victorian traditions to a new purpose—that of distilling "the beauty of mildness in life"—which was to inform almost all of his fiction after *Esther Waters*.

5. Conclusion

Brian Nicholas is right when he characterizes *Esther Waters* as "a blending of the naturalistic, the formally artistic and the ethical." The novel is also a "curious hybrid," as he suggests; but he is quite wrong in his assessment of it as "an interesting failure." Each of the elements I have examined—the naturalistic, the moral and the formal—is modified in Moore's novel to blend successfully with the others.

The naturalistic aspects of *Esther Waters*, even more than those in *A Mummer's Wife*, have been "softened." The milieu and the details that comprise it are factual and frank, but never gratuitiously sordid, and the overall effect is far from the depressing atmosphere that pervades most of Zola's novels. The narrator is effaced but lacks the clinical, scientific stance of most naturalistic narrators toward their characters. The characters themselves, apart from the more unfortunate minor characters, are not the helpless victims of their environment and heredity; heredity is mentioned only twice in regard to Esther ("The religion in which her soul moved and lived—the sternest Protestantism—strengthened and enforced the original convictions and the prejudices of her race" [63], and "this waste of money frightened her thrifty nature, inherited through centuries of working folk" [101]). Esther, in particular, is a modified version of a naturalistic character. She is a typical scullery-maid (but not quite), she functions largely by instinct (but not a purely animal instinct) and she has a hard life and comes to a sad end (but not entirely). The naturalistic formula is still there, but so modified that the grinding harshness normally found in naturalistic novels is entirely absent.

The "ethical" element in *Esther Waters* is similarly transformed. There is a Victorian "goodness" about Esther—she loves her husband and child first and foremost—but her love manifests itself in extremely practical ways. She is by no means the typical "good" (or even beautiful or intelligent) Victorian heroine; neither is her seducer a villain or her religious suitor a hero. Finally, she is not punished for her "sin," and in fact it is hinted that society is somewhat to blame for her plight. For all that, however, *Esther Waters* is an extremely "moral" novel in the English sense,[158] exuding an aura of the homely nobility of Esther and her struggle. The naturalistic elements, however, along with the plot reversals I have just outlined, ensure that this aspect of the novel never falls prey to either the melodrama or the sentimentality which beset many Victorian novels of the time. I disagree with Ohmann, for instance, when she complains that Moore underemphasizes Jackie; any more than we already see of him *would* be sentimental, and in any case it is Esther's story. The goodness of the novel, just like its sordidness, is muted, understated, held in check, giving the whole a sense of quiet realism not unlike that which invests *Marius* as well as Moore's later work.

The other quality Nicholas senses in *Esther Waters*—its formal artistry—is equally important to its overall impression. Moore's skilful handling of the various narrative elements of thought, speech, description and narration, and his deft transitions from one to the other, are an early indication of the direction his later prose experiments would take. Like Hardy, Moore tells a "good tale," but his attention to formal considerations such as pace, structure and the overall "movement" of the novel indicate Moore's more theoretical attention to the craft of novel-writing. The muted formal beauty of *Esther Waters*, with its suspended cadences and anti-climaxes, combines with its softened naturalism and understated morality to create a unified artistic whole, inspiring Lionel Johnson when the novel first appeared to remark that "The synthesis—to use a dreadful word—the synthesis of the book is perfect."[159]

All of these elements together mark *Esther Waters* as a unique literary creation, a true "hybrid" of the various influences which were affecting the English novel at the time. James's and Besant's "Art of Fiction" controversy,which drew attention to the novel as a serious art form, had begun exactly ten years earlier. Many of the works of the Russian novelists had been translated into English by this time and were beginning to be widely read. And, most importantly, by 1894 the French influence could hardly be ignored; the reading public, who had been unable to accept the stark naturalistic elements in *A Mummer's Wife* a decade earlier, was ready to accept a modified version of these elements in *Esther Waters*. As I have indicated, this French-English "hybrid" quality can be discerned as much in what the novel avoids as in what it contains: Hough points out that it lacks English jocularity and melodrama,[160] and Noël points out that it lacks French pessimism.[161] In this way, then, *Esther Waters* could be said to lack the worst of both worlds and indeed to approximate Granville Hicks' estimation of it as

> realism in the best British tradition, but . . . realism purged—thanks to Moore's discipline in the French school—of faults that had beset that tradition for a hundred years.[162]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Quoted in Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 161.

[2] George Moore, *A Communication to My Friends* (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1933), pp. 65-66.

[3] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 133.

[4] See Lynn C. Bartlett, "Maggie: A New Source for *Esther Waters*," *English Literature in Transition*, IX, 1 (1966), 18-20, and "From the Maid's Point of View," *The New Review*, V (Aug 1891), 170-81.

[5] Gilbert Frankau, *Self-Portrait* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1940), p. 100.

[6] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 126.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[8] Moore, *A Communication to My Friends*, p. 66.

[9] Paul Sporn, "*Esther Waters*: The Sources of the Baby-Farm Episode," *English Literature in Transition*, XI, 1 (1968), 39-41. Sporn considers the possibility that Moore got the idea for the baby-farm from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or *L'Education Sentimentale*, but dismisses it because "A close look at Flaubert's baby-farm episodes makes it plain that each differs considerably in function and descriptive detail from the one in Moore" (39).

[10] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 176.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

[12] Graham Hough, "George Moore and the Novel," *Image and Experience*, p. 202.

[13] Georges-Paul Collet, *George Moore et la France* (Paris: Librairie Minard, 1957), p. 145.

[14] Granville Hicks, "The Miracle of *Esther Waters*," *The Man of Wax*, p. 146.

[15] Graham Hough, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, by George Moore (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. v.

[16] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 45.

[17] Hough, "George Moore and the Nineties," *Image and Experience*, p. 184.

[18] Brian Nicholas, "The Case of *Esther Waters*," *The Moral and the Story*, p. 100.

[19] These include *Adam Bede, Madame Bovary, L'Assommoir, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, The Awkward Age, Thérèse Desqueyroux, The End of the Affair* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

[20] Nicholas, "The Case of *Esther Waters*," *The Moral and the Story*, p. 101.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[22] See Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, pp. 109-11, n. 13.

[23] Gerber, *George Moore in Transition*, pp. 95-96.

[24] Nicholas, "The Case of *Esther Waters*," *The Moral and the Story*, p. 99.

[25] Arthur Quiller-Couch, "Mr. George Moore," *The Speaker* (March 31, 1894), reprinted in *Adventures in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), p. 186.

[26] Reid, "The Novels of George Moore," 208.

[27] Hicks, "The Miracle of *Esther Waters*," *The Man of Wax*, p. 146.

[28] Eliza Aria, *My Sentimenal Self* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1922), p. 195.

[29] As Granville Hicks remarks, "The natural sympathies of boyhood were permitted to illuminate his art, tempering his theories and giving life to the data of Zolaesque research" ("The Miracle of *Esther Waters*," *The Man of Wax*, p. 147).

[30] George Moore, *Esther Waters*, ed. Lionel Stevenson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 4. All subsequent references to *Esther Waters* in the text are to this edition. As Edwin Gilcher remarks, "The editorial analysis and the two appendices, detailing textual differences between the editions of 1894 and 1899 and the editions of

1899 and 1920, makes this the most scholarly and at the same time the closest to a varorium edition of George Moore's works so far issued to the general reader" (*A Bibliography of George Moore* [Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1970], p. 46).

[31] "And then there is of course *Esther Waters*—a novel with a purpose, if you can imagine Mr. Moore writing such a thing. It is a book which sets forth the evils of gambling very powerfully. . . ." J. M. Kennedy, *English Literature 1880-1905* (London: Stephen Smith, 1912), p. 295.

[32] Gerber, *George Moore in Transition*, p. 94.

[33] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 186.

[34] Nicholas, "The Case of *Esther Waters*," *The Moral and the Story*, p. 112.

[35] For an extended comparison of these two scenes, see Furst, "George Moore, Zola, and the Question of Influence," 138-55.

[36] Newton, "Chance as Employed by Hardy and the Naturalists," 165.

[37] Furst, "George Moore, Zola, and the Question of Influence," 152.

[38] Ester's friend Sarah vomits at the drinking party after the Derby, but very discreetly: "When they got outside Sarah felt obliged to step aside; she came back, saying that she felt a little better" (242).

[39] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 165.

[40] See, for example, Miss Braddon's description of the death of Roland Lansdell (*A Doctor's Wife*, II, 265).

[41] Hone, with some amusement, tells us that "It seems Moore called in an accountant who checked the sales, and reckoned that Smith had lost about £1,500 by refusing to take *Esther Waters*. The partners of the firm then sent word to their librarian that it would be well in future to avoid the heavy losses of banning books, especially books that Mr. Gladstone would be likely to read and publicly approve in the *Westminster Gazette*" (*The Life of George Moore*, p. 205).

[42] Hardy, *Tess*, p. 111.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[45] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 134. In *Conversations in Ebury Street*, for example, Moore says of Tess's confession that "If Mr. Hardy shrank from the essential we can but conclude that it was a lack of invention, brain paralysis, something of the sort, that caused his abrupt retreat into the past indefinite"([New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924], p. 116). John Middleton Murry replied to Moore's attack on Hardy in "Wrap Me Up in My Aubusson Carpet" (*Adelphi*, April 1924) by pointing out that "Mr. Moore cannot really understand Mr. Hardy: he can understand . . . that Mr. Hardy's is genius and his own is talent, and he is angry and venomous" (*Wrap Me Up* [Folcroft: The Folcroft Press, 1924], p. 16). The enmity between Moore and Hardy lasted all their lives; Hardy once referred to Moore as a "putrid literary hermaphrodite," and even on his deathbed dictated an "epitaph" on Moore: "Heap dustbins on him/ They'll not meet/ The apex of his self conceit." See Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 533, 571.

[46] Geraint Goodwin, *Conversations with George Moore* (London: Ernest Benn, 1929), p. 158.

[47] Hardy, *Tess*, p. 268.

[48] Ian Gregor, "The Novel as Moral Protest: 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles,'" *The Moral and the Story*, p. 141.

[49] George Moore, "*La Debacle*," *Fortnightly Review*, LII (Aug 1, 1892), 206.

[50] With characteristic exaggeration, Moore was later to describe this episode in a letter to T. Fisher Unwin in the following manner: "The whole of *Esther Waters* turned on this question. . . . [It] is the very beginning of morality. Some people may think it is a disagreeable subject to discuss but the morality of this passage cannot be called into question. . . . All the moralists in England were delighted that this question was raised in *Esther Waters*" (Nov. 18, 1902, quoted in *George Moore in Transition*, pp. 268-69).

[51] Hardy, *Tess*, p. 268.

[52] See, for example, Hubert Crackanthorpe, "Reticence in Literature: Some Roundabout Remarks," *The Yellow Book*, II (1894), 259-68; Arthur Waugh, "Reticence in Literature," *The Yellow Book*, I (April 1894), 201-19; Mrs. B. A. Crackanthrope, "Sex in Modern Literature," *The Nineteenth Century,* XXXVII, 218 (April, 1895), 607-16; R.F., "The Question of Sex in Fiction," *The Athenaeum*, 4601 (Jan. 1916), 11-12.

[53] Robert Buchanan, *A Look Around Literature* (London: Ward and Downey, 1887), p. 304.

[54] Quoted in Lionel Stevenson, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. xvi.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

[56] W. H. Mallock, *A Human Document* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1912), pp. 24-25.

[57] Lionel Stevenson agrees, but regards the more direct method as "crass": "The Victorian novelists were fully aware of sex, perversion, psychoses, and everything else that seems to be so absorbing to present-day authors and readers. Aware of the naivete in a considerable segment of their public, they resorted to implication . . . . however, [they] were entirely capable of conveying the relevant facts without crass frankness" ("The Rationale of Victorian Fiction," 399).

[58] Huysmans, *À Rebours*, pp. 138-39. "But the Englishman's works produced the opposite effect from what he had expected: his chaste lovers and his puritanical heroines in their all-concealing draperies, sharing ethereal passions and just fluttering their eyelashes, blushing coyly, weeping for joy and holding hands, drove him to distraction. This exaggerated virtue made him react in the contrary direction; by virtue of the law of contrasts, he jumped from one extreme to the other, recalled scenes of full-blooded, earthy passion, and thought of common amorous practices such as the hybrid kiss, or the columbine kiss as ecclesiastical modesty calls it, where the tongue is brought into play" (*Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick, p. 109).

[59] Hardy, *Tess*, pp. 107-08.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 126. This suggestion of rape was one of five substantial alterations Hardy made in various revisions of the "seduction" scene. The scene itself, and all of its successive revisions, still leave the extent of Tess's complicity in the act ambiguous. For a full discussion of this scene and its alterations, see the recent scholarly edition of *Tess* by Simon Gatrell and Juliet Girdle (Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 45-46.

[61] George Steiner, "Eros and Idiom," *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 105.

[62] Collet, *George Moore et la France*, p. 142.

[63] Walter Allen, "Introduction," *Esther Waters* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1962), p. viii.

[64] Gerber, *George Moore in Transition*, p. 80.

[65] Murray, *My Contemporaries in Fiction*, p. 96.

[66] Katherine Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 245.

[67] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 80.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 133-34.

[70] Carol Ohmann, "George Moore's *Esther Waters*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XXV (1970-71), 180.

[71] Blanche, *Portraits of a Lifetime*, p. 293.

[72] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 133.

[73] Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 92.

[74] Seymour-Smith, "Rediscovering George Moore," 62-63.

[75] Goodwin, *Conversations with George Moore*, p. 159.

[76] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 186.

[77] Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 85.

[78] Furst and Skrine, *Naturalism*, p. 50.

[79] Graham Hough, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. x.

[80] Furst, "George Moore, Zola, and the Question of Influence," 153.

[81] Nicholas, "The Case of Esther Waters," *The Moral and the Story*, p. 110.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[83] Allen, *The English Novel*, p. 298.

[84] Seymour-Smith, "Rediscovering George Moore," 63.

[85] Moore, *Avowals*, pp.92, 197.

[86] Quiller-Couch, "Mr. George Moore, *Adventures in Criticism*, p. 186.

[87] In "The Forgotten Serial Version of George Moore's *Esther Waters*," Jay Jernigan notes that "In this section of the serial Esther feels that though she actually loves Fred she will reluctantly do as William asks; in the book she is bewildered and as a result feels ambivalent toward both" (*Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, XXIII [1968], 101). The book's situation, obviously, is much more "realistic."

[88] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 104.

[89] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 165.

[90] Gerber, *George Moore in Transition*, p. 94.

[91] *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 101.

[92] Cave, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, p. 96.

[93] Stevenson, "George Moore: Romantic, Naturalist, Aesthete," 366.

[94] Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, p. 102.

[95] *Ibid*, p. 29.

[96] Benjamin Waugh, "Baby-Farming," *Contemporary Review*, LVIIB (May 1890), 700-14.

[97] Havelock Ellis, *My Confessional* (Cambridge, Mass: The Riverside Press, 1934), pp. 208-09.

[98] Waugh, "Baby-Farming," 703.

[99] Sporn also says that "Although Moore uses Waugh for the specifics of his baby-farm episode, he continues to emulate Flaubert in general method and hostile attitude toward the bourgeoisie and is less compromising than Frierson ["George Moore Compromised with the Victorians," *The Man of Wax*, pp. 75-86] allows" (Sporn, "*Esther Waters*: The Sources of the Baby-Farm Episode," 41). In a later article, however, Sporn appears to have (erroneously, in my opinion) changed his mind: "The main evidence for [Frierson's 'compromise' theory] . . . is *Esther Waters*, where large class divisions and antagonisms are left in the shadows of the narrative and the heroine is a victim of the individual callousness, widespread, to be sure, but not inherent in the structure of society. . . ." ("Marriage and Class Conflict: The Subversive Link in George Moore's *A Drama in Muslin*," 7).

[100] Waugh, "Baby-Farming," 714.

[101] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 102.

[102] Moore, "*Defensio*," 281.

[103] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 105.

[104] Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, p. 11.

[105] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 132. This was an idea Moore voiced (only half ironically) in *Confessions*, and in which he persisted long afterwards: "Thine, O Education, are the yearning of souls sick of life, of maddening discontent, of all the fearsome and fathomless sufferings of the mind. . . . It will be written in the Statute Book that not more than one child in a hundred shall be taught to read, and no more than one in ten thousand shall learn the piano" (p. 140). This notion was possibly derived partly from Moore's "paganism," partly from his elitism and partly from his own early inability to learn, which is strikingly similar to Esther's: in 1890 he confesses, "When I was five-and-twenty I could not distinguish between a verb and a noun, and until a few years ago I could not punctuate a sentence. This suggests idiocy; but I was never stupid, although I could not learn; I simply could not write consecutive sentences" (George Bainton, ed., *The Art of Authorship* [New York: D. Appleton, 1890], p. 73).

[106] Indeed, Seth's first appearance is remarkably similar to that of Fred: "Seth's broad shoulders have a slight stoop; his eyes are grey; his eyebrows have less prominence and more repose than his brother's; and his glance, instead of being keen, is confiding and benignant. He has thrown off his paper cap, and you see that his hair is not thick and straight, like Adam's, but thin and wavy, allowing you to descern the exact contour of a coronal arch that predominates very decidedly over the brow." George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1906), p. 8. As Moore read and commented on *Adam Bede* shortly before he wrote *Esther Waters*, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the similarity (as well as the reversal) is quite deliberate.

[107] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 136.

[108] Hughes, "Introduction," *The Man of Wax*, p. x.

[109] Mallock, *A Human Document*, pp. 24-25.

[110] Hough, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. xi.

[111] Moore, *A Communication to My Friends*, p. 66.

[112] Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel*, p. 89.

[113] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 251.

[114] Ohmann, "George Moore's *Esther Waters*," 181.

[115] *Ibid*, 185.

[116] Hough, "George Moore and the Novel," *Image and Experience*, p. 210.

[117] Humbert Wolfe, *George Moore* (London: Butterworth, 1931), p. 125.

[118] R. Ellis Roberts, "George Moore," *Nineteenth Century and After*, CXIII (March 1933), 372.

[119] "Esther Waters,"*Athenaeum*, CV (April 28, 1894), 537.

[120] Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists*, p. 245.

[121] Virginia Woolf, "George Moore," *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 101.

[122] Quoted in Stevenson, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. xiv.

[123] Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 489.

[124] Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature," 867.

[125] Allen, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. vii.

[126] Moore, *Avowals*, pp. 196-97.

[127] George Moore, "Preface," *Poor Folk*, p. vii.

[128] Stevenson, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. xiii.

[129] Hough, "George Moore and the Novel," *Image and Experience*, p. 209.

[130] Hough, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. xi.

[131] "Esther Waters," *Athenaeum*, CV (April 28, 1894), 537.

[132] Mansfield, *Novels and Novelists*, pp. 243-44.

[133] Hardy, *Tess*, p. 189.

[134] John Freeman (designated by Martin Seymour-Smith as a "gormless" Moore critic) disagrees, singling out the "gold" passage as a supreme instance of the "music . . . distinguishable in the whole narrative" ("Mr. George Moore," *London Mercury*, II [July 1920], 282).

[135] Stevenson, "Introduction," *Esther Waters*, p. xxiii.

[136] Ohmann, "George Moore's *Esther Waters*," 179.

[137] See Chapter II, n. 86.

[138] Dickens's more daring combinations are described in Roy Pascal's *The Dual Voice*, pp. 67-75.

[139] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 100.

[140] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 137.

[141] Fernando, *"New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel*, p. 88.

[142] Hardy, *Tess*, p. 318.

[143] Moore, *Confessions*, p. 162.

[144] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 137.

[145] See, for example, Carol Reed Anderson, "Time, Space and Perspective in Thomas Hardy," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, IX (1954-55), 192: "Almost to a man, critics must admit his appeal; yet when driven to account for it, they take refuge in critical apparatus which proves only that Hardy is a stylistic bungler."

[146] Ernest Baker, for example, in *The History of the English Novel* (p. 201), remarks that Moore "was not one of the great creative geniuses; he belonged to the second order, distinguished by fine qualities of craftsmanship. . . ."

[147] Hicks, "The Miracle of *Esther Waters*," *The Man of Wax*, p. 147.

[148] Starkie, *From Gautier to Eliot*, p. 77.

[149] Hughes, "Introduction," *The Man of Wax*, p. xiv.

[150] Gerber, *George More in Transition*, p. 97.

[151] "It was not till I heard *Tristan* a third time that the musical pattern began to disclose itself . . . for some years [I] was seldom absent from the symphony concerts, where I listened with more critical

ears to my old friends, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, thinking how a story might be woven from start to finish out of one set of ideas, each chapter rising out of the preceding chapter in suspended cadence always, never a full close" ("The Nineness in the Oneness," *Century Magazine*, n.s., LXXXVII [Nov. 1919], 65-66.

[152] Frierson, "George Moore Compromised with the Victorians," *The Man of Wax*, p. 84.

[153] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 111, n. 15.

[154] Alan Friedman, *The Turn of the Novel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. xiii.

[155] E. K. Brown, *Rhythm in the Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 11.

[156] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 255.

[157] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences," *The Man of Wax*, p. 100.

[158] See my discussion of distinctions between the French and English notions of morality in the novel in Chapter I.

[159] Quoted in Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 194.

[160] Hough, "George Moore and the Novel," *Image and Experience*, p. 202.

[161] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 251.

[162] Hicks, "The Miracle of *Esther Waters*," *The Man of Wax*, pp. 146-47.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

That the nineteenth century should possess a literature characteristic of its nervous, passionate life, I hold is as desirable, and would be as far-reaching in its effects, as the biggest franchise bill ever planned.[1]

George Moore in *Literature at Nurse* (1885)

In 1909 Forrest Reid remarked with some puzzlement that "Mr. Moore belongs to no school, has nothing at all in common with any other English novelist,"[2] and critics both before and since have exhibited much difficulty in assigning Moore his "place" in English literary history. Part of this difficulty is undoubtedly exacerbated by Moore's own apparent contempt for the entire English tradition; as Malcolm Brown points out,

> Rejected from [Moore's] canon of the English novel were the works of Fielding, Smollett, Scott, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Dickens (with reservations), Bulwer-Lytton, Thackeray, Trollope, George Eliot (except *The Mill on the Floss*), Meredith, . . . Stevenson, Henry James, Wilde, Hardy, Conrad, Galsworthy, and all post-Edwardian novelists except Bennett, Charles Morgan, and David Garnett. . . . When one removed from the roster of novelists all the offending names, plus the names of those whom he simply ignored, such as Gissing, Samuel Butler, and H. G. Wells, whose work is not mentioned in all of Moore's writings, the acceptable novelists in English would be found to consist of Richardson, Jane Austen, Anne Brontë, and Walter Pater, besides the three younger novelists mentioned. The record of the English novel was in his opinion largely one of weakness and failure.[3]

Another difficulty is posed by the conflict of Moore's passionate belief in "la correction de la forme" with the English penchant for a didactic "morality" in literature. In this context, in fact, many English critics speak as though Moore's formal concerns were incompatible with moral concerns. Ernest Baker, for instance, claims that Moore "was not one of the great creative geniuses; he belonged to the second order, distinguished by fine craftsmanship. . . ."[4] and F. R. Leavis dismisses Moore because "the . . . great English novelists . . . [have] the opposite of an affinity with Pater and George

Moore; it is . . . an unusually developed interest in life."[5] As I pointed out in Chapter I, this objection is closely related to the lack of a consistent "personality" in Moore's novels; except in his later work, there is no comfortable, familiar sense of recognition when we open his pages. Moore's character seems to be first one thing and then another, quite different, thing, according to his artistic beliefs of the moment. Virginia Woolf found that

> This complex character, at once diffident and self-assertive, this sportsman who goes out shooting in ladies' high-heeled boots, this amateur jockey who loves literature beyond the apple of his eye, this amorist who is so innocent, this sensualist who is so ascetic, this complex and uneasy character, in short, with its lack of starch and pomp and humbug, its pliability and malice and shrewdness and incompetence, is made of too many incompatible elements to concentrate into the diamond of a great artist. . . .[6]

The critical struggle to "place" Moore in a tradition is in itself revealing. Partly, it reflects the insufficiency of conventional critical terminology in describing his work; it does not make sense to try to categorize Moore as "French" or "English" because he was a curious product of both literary cultures. And, as Noël cogently points out, "s'il est difficile de loger l'oeuvre de Moore dans les catégories admises, il faut ajouter que cela ne diminue en rien sa valeur. Cette difficulté en montre au contraire la richesse. . . . Il n'est pas, nous semble-t-il, de meilleure preuve de la grandeur de l'artiste que cette ambivalence qu'elle confère a l'étude critique."[7] The "richesse" of Moore's work, however, has been largely overlooked in the proliferation of "influence" studies on him. Seeing his work as a perfect "microcosm" of the multifarious literary influences of his day, critics have been more than usually content to restrict their comments on Moore to straightforward comparison studies, ignoring the work itself. As Claudio Guillen points out, however, "The fundamental difference between *artistic value* and influential value, . . . seems quite simple . . . [but] it appears to be easily forgotten, curiously enough, when the object of consideration is extended under the aegis of literary history."[8]

In this thesis I have attempted to examine the artistic value, without neglecting the "influential" value, of the three best-known novels of Moore's early period. These three novels, as I have shown, are fine works of art in their own right, quite apart from what they reveal about the cross-currents of literary influence between France and England near the end of the nineteenth century. *A Mummer's Wife* is a complex and powerful literary creation as well as the first English novel to display the influence of French naturalism; *A Drama in Muslin* is a richly-textured Victorian "social" novel as well as the first English novel to display the influence of French symbolism; and *Esther Waters* is an almost perfect blend of naturalism into the Victorian tradition to produce a novel which is both "modern" and a fine instance of English realism. It is of *Esther Waters* that Malcolm Brown speaks when he asserts that "It is owing to George Moore as much as to any artist of his time that the formlessness, the sentimentality, the tendentiousness, the evangelical piety, the compulsive dishonesty that were once all but universal in English fiction have today disappeared from the serious novels written in our language."[9] This is not an exaggeration; *Esther Waters* represents the English tradition "humbled" by naturalism and shorn of both mannerism and excessive idealism.

Another corrective administered by Moore's three realistic novels, and particularly the latter two, was their modification of the "feminist" ideas which were being expounded in the novels of the time. Alice Barton is a much more viable and realistic example of how an intelligent woman might opt out of the marriage-market than any of the heroines of the "purity" school,[10] Cecilia Cullen demonstrates Moore's awareness (and disapprobation) of the feminist heroines of the "neurotic" type, and Esther Waters is something totally unprecedented in the history of "feminist" literature: a heroine who is plain, unintelligent and working-class—unexceptional in every way—and who succeeds in making a life for herself and her illegitimate child in spite of these things. In this way *Esther Waters* administers a powerful antidote both to the Victorian ideal of womanhood (of which even Tess partakes) and to the feminist notion that a woman had to be highly intelligent and idealistic in order to break free of society's conventions. Sensible Esther is thus the first working-class "New Woman."

While *Esther Waters* marks the culmination of Moore's "realist" achievement, *A Mummer's Wife* and *A Drama in Muslin* are achievements in their own right, and certainly deserve more critical attention than they have received in the past. As Peter Ure remarks, these three novels "share a deep-lying similarity of construction and design, and . . . there is something odd about the way in which the third has prospered at the expense of the other two."[11] Malcolm Brown is more extravagant in his praise of Moore's realistic novels:

> One does not hesitate to label him a very important literary figure. His *Esther Waters* and *A Mummer's Wife* stand as two of the dozen most perfectly wrought novels to appear in the English realistic tradition since the high noon of Victorian genius, novels not out of place in the company of the best novels of the language. At least six of his other novels seem assured of "permanence," [including] . . . *A Drama in Muslin*. . . .[12]

If this is not entirely true it is nearly true; certainly Wells, Maugham or Gissing never wrote anything as good as *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* or *Esther Waters*, and yet Moore is constantly referred to as a writer of similar (or even of lesser) stature. George Levine, for instance, refers to the "later realism that Gissing explored, [and] in which George Moore dabbled."[13] Moore's contribution to the realistic novel in English has yet to be recognized, possibly because it has been overshadowed by his little understood "second re-creation" of the novel, his melodic line.

As Brown remarks, *Esther Waters* was Moore's "farewell to realism."[14] Thereafter he embarked on a successful but (so far) neglected experiment with the form of the novel. The realist principles Moore learned in the three novels I have discussed he never abandoned, however; the careful attention to the concrete world of things and the repose and quiet matter-of-factness of *Esther Waters* inform all of his later work.

In fact, Moore's final prose experiment is one of the few aspects of his work which can be at least partly explained in terms of his personality. Roland Stromberg points out that after the time of Thomas Hardy, "we enter a different moral universe—bitter, tragic, pessimistic, . . .":[15] the modern world, in fact. Hough nicely pinpoints Moore's deviation from this twentieth-century attitude:

> This moral integrity of his work is one that owes much to his early realist training, and, strangely enough, owes something to the insouciance and irresponsibility that puzzles us in his life. Moore has none of the twentieth-century maladies; he does not suffer from anxiety, or a sense of guilt, or the plight of modern man. (I doubt if he knew we were in one.) So his characters are not coloured by any overwhelming emotional tincture of his own. This makes him very unlike most modern novelists: but it also means that he can see people simply as they are. The spectacles through which he looks at the world neither magnify nor diminish, and they are made of uncoloured glass. So that he becomes a superb recorder, quite irrespective of his own sentiments and opinions.[16]

So, while Joyce developed one of the "voices" discernible in the increasingly popular device of free indirect speech—that of the character—Moore chose to develop the other voice, that of the narrator. The stream-of-consciousness novel, in other words, might be said to consist of all "showing," while Moore's melodic line consists of all "telling." Therefore, while both Moore and Joyce were impressed with Dujardin's prose experiment in *Les lauriers sont coupés*, I think it might be inaccurate to claim, as Gerber does, that Moore "did not recognize in the book what James Joyce was later to recognize."[17] What is more likely, given Moore's temperament and fascination with oral narration, is that he simply chose another direction. Hough, in fact, speaks of Moore's influence on Joyce in no uncertain terms:

> No writer in the world has carried farther than James Joyce a dual allegiance to an exhaustive naturalism on the one hand and a complex aesthetic symbolism on the other; and I think it is likely that neither the title nor the content of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* would have been quite the same in 1916 if it had not been for the prior existence of Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* in 1886. And there are other resemblances more strongly marked. Critics have often spoken about the absolute originality of Joyce's *Dubliners*; and that is a curious instance of how far George Moore's achievements have dropped out of sight. . . . For *Dubliners* has an obvious ancestor in Moore's stories in *The Untilled Field*. Joyce's stories have an urban instead of a rural setting, and make far more use of the romantic-ironical contrast. But it is surprising that the closeness of his manner to Moore's has not been observed.[18]

Whether one agrees with Bonamy Dobree's laudatory description of Moore's melodic line ("clouds arising out of clouds . . . like silk from a spool")[19] or with Yeats's derogatory one ("ribbons of toothpaste squeezed out of a tube"),[20] it is certainly true that it has gone mainly unnoticed except as an aberration. As Malcolm Brown remarks, "None of these latter novels fits a pattern that is modish just now, and all lie awaiting their eventual rediscovery and resurrection after today's dominant tastes have passed with the mutation of things."[21] Like Joyce, Moore became obsessed with time; *Ulysses* "stretches" time to cover a single day, while *The Brook Kerith* "condenses" it to cover several lifetimes. And, like *Ulysses*, *The Brook Kerith* is an experiment in novel form which is of interest mainly to the novel critic rather than to the lay reader. As to the actual influence Moore's melodic line had on the history of the novel, however, there is no comparison. The evolution of the modern novel followed Joyce, not Moore, despite Charles Morgan's prediction that

> Here, plainly, . . . is something new in English literature that will have a lasting influence precisely because it is not new in the sense of being without roots. It will have a future because it has a past. Three great influences are perceptible in it [Landor, Turgenev and Pater]. . . . To think of his style as if it consisted only in a faultless control of phrase and cadence is to deny him his place in literature.[22]

As Hough rightly perceives, however, Moore's influence on Joyce is in itself a substantial contribution to the course of novel-history:

> James is a far greater, Hardy and Conrad more central writers than Moore. It is relatively easy to fit them into a "great tradition" of English fiction. Moore has always his own marked idiosyncracy, and the criticism of our time, in its preoccupation with prevalent trends and successful revolutions rather than with individual quality, has been inclined to see it as a dead end. This is not, I think, true; and if it is necessary to justify Moore to the trend-mongers one may do so by showing that he was leading, if not up the main road, into an area where the greatest prose experiment of our time has its beginning.[23]

Apart from Joyce, Moore has had a direct influence on writers as different from each other as Bennett, Wilde and D. H. Lawrence.[24] The extent of his indirect influence, like that of all significant writers, is difficult to assess. He may not have been so influential as Henry James, but he stands with James at a turning-point of the English novel (or, as Stevenson puts it, "at the eye of the hurricane");[25] unlike James, however, Moore has not received the critical recognition he merits. This is partly because of the unevenness of his work. The weak "aesthetic" novels of his early period, for example, co-exist with the three strong realistic ones. But, as Max Beerbohm remarked of Moore, "A man must be judged by what is fine in him, not by what is trivial";[26] and the achievements of *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters* have undoubtedly permeated English fiction in subtle and inevitable ways, much as Moore hoped his ashes would disperse themselves through the universe after his death:

> Millions of years will pass away, the earth will become cool, and out of the primal mud life will begin again in the shape of plants, and then of fish, and then of animals . . . and I believe that billions of years hence, . . . I shall be sitting in the same room where I sit now, writing the same lines that I am now writing: I believe that again, a few years later, my ashes will swing in the moveless and silent depths of the pacific ocean, and that the same figures, the same nymphs, and the same fauns will dance around me again.[27]

Douglas Hughes believes that Moore "was one of the great influencing forces in modern British literature and five or six of his works, despite his apparent neglect today, are destined for immortality."[28] If this is true—and I believe it is—then certainly *A Mummer's Wife*, *A Drama in Muslin* and *Esther Waters*, which contain an abundance of both felt life and formal beauty, are among them.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, p. 22.

[2] Reid, "The Novels of George Moore," 201.

[3] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 197.

[4] Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, p. 201.

[5] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), pp. 8-9.

[6] Virginia Woolf, "George Moore," *The Death of the Moth*, p. 102.

[7] Noël, *George Moore*, p. 547.

[8] Claudio Guillen, "The Aesthetics of Literary Influence," *Influx*, ed. Ronald Primeau (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1977), p. 63.

[9] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 216.

[10] See Chapter III, n., p. 71.

[11] Ure, "George Moore as Historian of Consciences, *The Man of Wax*, p. 90.

[12] Brown, *George Moore*, p. xi.

[13] George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 5.

[14] Brown, *George Moore*, p. 138.

[15] Stromberg, *Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism*, p. xxxiv.

[16] Hough, "George Moore and the Novel, *Image and Experience*, p. 209.

[17] Gerber, *George Moore and Transition*, p. 139.

[18] Hough, "George Moore and the Nineties," *Image and Experience*, pp. 197-98.

[19] Bonamy Dobree, "George Moore's Final Works," *The Man of Wax*, pp. 315-16.

[20] Quoted in Hone, *The Life of George Moore*, p. 477.

[21] Brown, *George Moore*, p. xi.

[22] Morgan, *Epitaph on George Moore*, pp. 37, 47.

[23] Hough, "George Moore and the Nineties," *Image and Experience*, p. 197.

[24] See C. Heywood, "D.H. Lawrence's *The Lost Girl* and its Antecedents by George Moore and Arnold Bennett," *English Studies*, XLVII (1966), 131-34.

[25] Stevenson, "George Moore: Romantic, Naturalist, Aesthete," 366.

[26] Max Beerbohm, "George Moore," *The Atlantic Monthly*, CLXXXVI (Dec. 1950), 39.

[27] George Moore, *Memoirs of My Dead Life* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), pp. 282-83.

[28] Hughes, "Introduction," *The Man of Wax*, p. xxiv.

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PUBLICATIONS:

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Hydrology Report (Saskatchewan)
Climate Report
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Recreation Report (Saskatchewan)
Archaeology Report
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